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THE MAIDENS OF THE ROCKS



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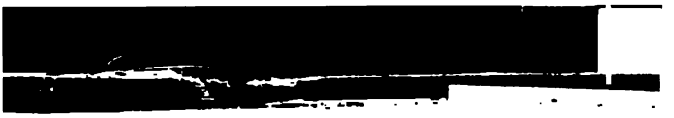


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BY

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

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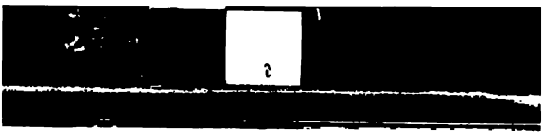
GIUSEPPE ANTONA

"I will construct a fiction
Which shall express great things"
— LEONARDO DA VINCI



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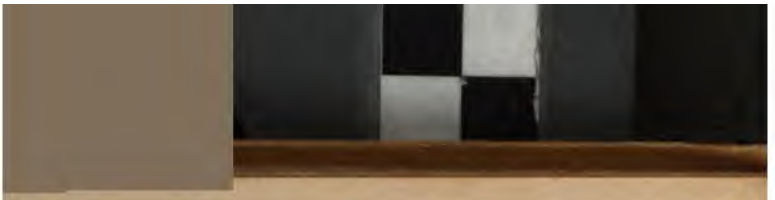
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PROLOGUE.

"A natural thing reflected in a great example."
—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

WHAT I am about to relate was seen by mine own eyes, within whose observance, and in an incredibly short space of time, three souls without equal, the most beautiful, the most ardent, the most miserable which have ever appeared in the long ancestry of an imperious race, expanded, sparkled out, faded and then perished, one after the other.

So anxious was I to discover the mystery of their remote lineage that I explored the depth of far-reaching, family examples, without their recognizing, in this probing of the past history of their name, their own likenesses bathed with a pallor like that of dissolution after death, and I searched and scrutinized at length all the consumed, worn-out things upon which their cold, feverish hands rested in the same attitude perhaps that other hands, already long crumbling to dust, had employed, while from the spots which knew familiarly each day their grace and their pride, and which had become a part of their iso-



lated seclusion, I gathered thoughts, meanings and resolutions at once more brightly transparent, yet more formidable than the ruins of illustrious cities had ever called up to me.

Did I in truth know them in the intimate tediousness of every day life, or were they instead the creations of my desire and my perplexity? I ask myself the question so often, and always the answer rises, "They were the creatures both of your incertitude and your desire, they were the tried friends of daily fellowship," and that passage of my life's woof that they unconsciously spun, has such an inestimable worth for me that I would impregnate it with an aroma most acutely preserving, to keep aloof the paling, destructive touch of Time.

And for that purpose I to-day essay art!

Ah, what sorcery could ever give the consistency of tangible and lasting matter to that spiritual tissue that the three prisoners wove in threads during tedious days, and afterward filled in, little by little, with shadows of the noblest and most ruined dreams in which hopeless human passion has ever beheld itself?

Unlike the sisters three of antiquity, because not daughters but victims of fate, they, in composing my life's richest zone, spun out nevertheless unfailingly my destiny, working ever together, seldom cheered

by the accompaniment of a song, and often bathing their labor with visible tears which exhaled the essences of their inexhausted, imprisoned souls.

From the first hour that I knew them to be menaced by a threatening doom, crushed by a tyrannical prohibition, discouraged, impatiently longing, and next to perishing, all of their attitudes, their acts, their vaguest words seemed grave to me, and to signify that, which they themselves, in their profound unconsciousness, ignored.

Yielding and becoming broken under the weight of their maturity, like trees in autumn too heavily fruit-laden, they knew neither how to estimate their sorrow nor to acknowledge it, and their anguish-swollen lips revealed to me only a small part of their secret.

But I—I saw further than they did, and knew how to understand the ineffable things told by the eloquent blood in their beautiful naked hands.

"And the asylum of the virtues
Will be full of dreams and vain hopes."
—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

WHEN I imagine the hour which preceded my arrival in the ancient family garden where they awaited me, it appears to me illuminated by a light of rare poesy.

For him who knows of those slow or sudden developments, of those unexpected transfigurations of which an intense soul communicating with other souls in the vicissitudes of a most uncertain life may be capable; for him, who replacing all the dignity of existence with the exercise or subjection of moral violence, approaches his equal with the secret hope of dominating or of being dominated; for every man curious of the internal mystery, and ambitious of spiritual power or needful of captivity, no hour has the spell of that in which he moves with a vague foresight towards the Unknown and the living Infinite, dark vital world that he will conquer, or by will be absorbed.

I was about to penetrate into a mysterious garden. Therein the three marriageable princesses awaited the long unseen, almost unknown friend, the somewhat contemporary to whom they were bound by certain remembrances of childhood and of youth, the only heir of a name not less ancient nor less worthy than their own. Thus he became to them an equal, a comer-back from magnificent cities, the messenger of a breath of that great life which they had renounced.

And each perhaps, in her secret heart, awaited a possible lover.

The anxiety of that expectation appears forcibly to me when I think of the bare and bleak solitude in which they had languished, until that day, with their beautiful hands overflowing with the wealth of youth, and in the presence of incomprehensible images, likenesses of almost royal life and pomp, created by the maternal madness to people the emptiness of vast mirrors. From the infinite distances of those pale dominions, like twilight marshes, where the mother's mad soul was submerged raving, had not each seen the young, ardent form of the lover appear who would deliver her from the gloomy consummation, and exhalt her suddenly with a whirlwind of joyousness?

Thus each in her enclosed garden awaited with in-

quietude, him who was to know her only to beguile her, and see her perish without possessing her.

"Ah, which of us will be chosen?"

This was their secret thought, and never, perhaps, had their beautiful slumberous eyes been more attentive than in that hour—weary, melancholy eyes in which long habit of uniform glances had abolished the mobility of investigation: mutely devout pitiful eyes where the forms of familiar beings were reflected without mystery and without change, firm in the lines and color of inert life.

And suddenly each saw in each a new creature, girded with weapons.

I do not know what event may be saddest of these lightning-like revelations that the great desire for happiness causes in tender hearts. The three virtuous sisters, crushed by the same destiny, breathed the same atmosphere of sorrow, and in evenings heavy with anxiety and pain, from time to time one would lean her forehead upon the shoulder or breast of the other, while the shadows equalized the diversity of their countenances, and intermingled the three souls in one.

But now that the announced visitor was about to set foot upon their deserted threshold, and already to their expectation appeared in the attitude of one who

would choose and promise, they held their heads this night haughtily erect, unclasped the twisted fingers, and exchanged a glance that had the force of an unlooked-for irradiation.

And while from the depth of their disturbed souls, an unknown sentiment deprived of pristine sweetness issued, they recognized all at once in that glance, all of their fading grace, the contrast of their faces illuminated with the same blood, and how much night was gathered up in the magnitude of a dense head of hair so thick that it seemed to punish a too pale nape of the neck; they saw and felt suddenly the marvelous persuasions expressed by the curve of a silent mouth, the spell woven like net-work, in the ingenuous concentration of an inimitable movement, and every other power known to the wiles of womanhood burst into being also for them in that hour.

And a dark instinct of struggle dismayed them.

Such my imagination pictures those who were awaiting me that luminous hour.

The first scarcely tepid breath of spring which touched the arid heights of the rocks fondled the temples of the restless maidens. In the great colonnaded courtyard, flowered with jonquils and violets, the fountains repeated the melodious comment that for centuries murmuring water, as expressed in the

doggerel of dedications or consecrations, has made upon prudence, wisdom or voluptuous thoughts.

On certain trees and shrubs the tender leaves shone as if enveloped in diaphanous gum or wax. To the most ancient and unchangeable substances of time, whose only future was waste and dissolution, an indefinite softness was communicated by the things, which in fresh blossoming were yearly renewed.

"Ah, which of us will be the chosen one?"

The thought grew and flourished, and the three sisters become rivals in secret before a deceptive offer of apparent life, arranged their attitudes according to the inward rhythm of a beauty whose truthful sense they had perhaps only that day understood, like the patient who, hearing the unusual sound of blood filling an ear pressed down upon the pillow, understands for the first time the portentous music which upholds his perishing substance.

But perhaps in them that rhythm had no words.

It seems to me, however, that even to-day the sentiments of that rhythm rise distinct, supporting the pure lines of imaginary ideals.

"I suffer with an unbridled need of slavery," thought Massimilla in silence, seated on the stone bench, her clasped fingers upholding a tired knee. "I have not the power to communicate happiness,

but no living creature and no inanimate thing could, like my person, become the perfect and perpetual possession of a master.

"I want to be in subjection to some one; the desire for that bondage makes me suffer. An inextinguishable wish to donate my whole self devours me to belong to a higher and a stronger being, to dissolve myself in his will, to burn like a holocaust in the fire of his immense soul.

"I envy the slender things which are lost, swallowed up in an abyss or dragged away in a whirlwind, and often and long I contemplate the drops which fall into this fountain basin, awakening scarcely the slightest ripple, yet becoming one with a whole greater than themselves.

"When a subtle perfume enwraps me for an instant and then vanishes, or when a sound strikes me and fades away, I feel myself becoming pale and nearly fainting; it seems as if the fragrance and harmony of my life approach the same evanescence, although sometimes my small soul contracts within me like a knot. Who shall be the one to untie and absorb it?

"Alas! perhaps I would not know how to console his sadness; but my anxious, mute face would turn ever towards him, spying out the new-born hopes of his secret heart. Perhaps I should not know how to

sow rare syllables in his silence, soul-germs that in an instant would generate an immeasurable dream, but no faith in the world would conquer the ardor of my faith, in listening to those things which must remain inaccessible to my intellect.

"I am she who would listen, admire and be silent.

"From my birth my forehead has borne between the eyebrows the mark of attention, the sign of application, and from the fixed, intent statues I have learned the immobility of a harmonious attitude.

"I can look long and fixedly on high with wide-open gaze, because my eyelids are light.

"In the form of my lips is the living and visible figure of the word 'Amen!'"

"I suffer," said Anatolia to herself, "from a virtue that is uselessly consumed within me. My strength is the last support of a solitary ruin, when it could securely guide, from the fountain-head to the mouth, a stream overflowing with all the abundance of life.

"My heart is indefatigable. All the sorrows of earth could not succeed in tiring its palpitations; the wildest violence of joy would not break it, and this long, slow pain does not emaciate it. An immense multitude of eager creatures could saturate themselves in its tenderness without exhausting it.

"Why, then, should my destiny condemn me to this

narrow duty, this dull torment? Why is the sublime alliance that my heart longs for forbidden me?

"I could exalt a manly soul to that sublime circle where the value of the act and the splendor of the dream converge towards the same apex; I could extract from the sealed book of his unconsciousness occult energies ignored, like metals in the veins of crude rock.

"The most doubtful man would find certainty at my side; he who misses the light would see the steadfast gleaming in the distances of his pathway, and he who was beaten and mutilated would return whole and in health. My hands know alike how to wrap a bandage around wounds, and to pluck it off from oppressed eye-lids, and when I extend my hands, my heart's purest blood flows magnetically to my finger-tips.

"I possess two supreme gifts that amplify existence, and prolong it beyond the illusion of death—I am not afraid to suffer, and I feel upon my thoughts and my acts the impress of eternity.

"Because of this I am agitated by this desire to create, to become for love, her who might propagate and perpetuate the ideality of a race favored by Heaven. My body could nourish a superhuman germ.

"All night, once in a dream, I watched mysteriously

over the sleep of a child. While his body slumbered with profound breathings, I upheld his tangible soul like a crystal sphere in my palms, and my bosom swelled with marvelous predictions."

Violante reflected, "I am humiliated: feeling the mass of my hair weigh upon my forehead, I believed to wear a crown, and my thoughts under that royal weight were purple-colored. The memory of my infancy is lighted up by a vision of carnage and of fires; my pure eyes saw currents of blood, my delicate nostrils scented the odor of unburied dead.

"A queen, young and ardent, who had lost her throne, raised me in her arms before starting for the asylum from which she would never return, consequently for me the beginning of time marked upon my soul the splendor of sad, magnificent destinies.

"In dreams I have lived a thousand stately lives, traversing all assured empires like he who treads a path already long known. In the aspects of most unlike things I knew how to discover secret analogies with the appearances of my form, and by a hidden art to show them to the wonder of men, to subject shadows and lights like garments and jewels, to compose a divine and unthought of embellishment to my fragility.

"Poets saw in me the fair creature in whose visible

outlines was inclosed the highest mystery of Life, the mystery of Beauty revealed in mortal flesh, after intervals of a century, through the imperfection of innumerable descendants. And they thought—'Justly is this the perfect representation of the Idea that earthly peoples have realized confusedly for all time, and artificers invoked without rest in poems and symphonies, in canvas and in clay. All is expressed in her, and all in her is wonderful. Her contours speak a language which renders him who understands the eternal truth of them, similar to a god, and her slightest movements produce in the confines of her body an infinite music like that of the night heavens.'

"But here am I humiliated, deprived of my kingdoms! The flame of my blood pales and extinguishes itself. I will fade out and disappear less fortunate than the statues which witnessed the joys and tumult of life before sacked cities long disappeared, for I will be dissolved, forever unknown, while they will endure, custodians of the darkness, humid with the roots of flowers, and one day resurrected will seem majestic as the gifts of the Earth to the ecstatic soul of kneeling poets.

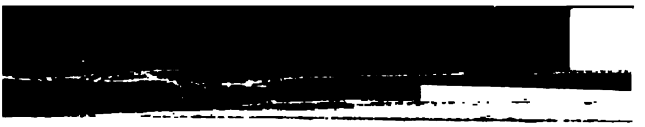
"I have dreamed all dreams, and my hair weighs me down more than a hundred crowns. Stupefied by perfume, I love to remain near the fountains which relate continuously the same fable, while through the



dense locks that cover my ears, I hear how in the distance, time flows indefinitely in the monotony of the waters."

Thus speak in me the three princesses as I evoke them, waiting in that irrevocable hour. Perhaps thus, believing that a messenger of Life presented himself at the gates of the closed garden, each recognized her virtue, shed out her seduction, reanimated her hope, agitated the dream that was to be congealed.

Ah, thou hour illuminated by a grand and solemn poesy! Most brilliant hour, in which from the recesses of the soul emerged and shone forth all possibilities!



I.

"One can have no greater dominion than that of himelf."

—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

"And if thou wilt be alone, thou wilt be all thine own."

—LEONARDO DA VINCI.



AFTER the first tumults of youth subdued, the too vehement and discordant wishes beaten, a barrier placed against the confused and innumerable irruptions of the senses, I had investigated in the momentary silence of my conscience whether it might happen that life could become a different pursuit than the accustomed accommodation of faculties to suit the continual varying of cases: that is, whether my will could by means of choice and exclusion draw a new, dignified work from the elements that life had accumulated within me, and after some examination I assured myself that my conscience had reached the arduous degree in which it is possible to understand this too simple axiom, viz.:

The world is the representation of the sensibility and the thought of a few superior men, who have made it what it is, and in the course of time broadened and adorned it. In the future they will still farther amplify and enrich it, and the world as it today appears, is a magnificent gift granted by the few to the many, from the free to the slaves, from those who think and feel, to those who must work.

And I recognized consequently the highest of my

ambitions, in the desire to bring likewise some ornament, to add some new value to this human world that is eternally increasing in beauty and in grief.

Confronted with the presence of my own soul, I bethought me of the dream that often occured to Socrates, assuming each time a different figure, but persuading him always to the same duty, "Oh Socrates, compose and cultivate music!"

Thus I learned that the duty of a noble man may well be that of studiously discovering in the course of his life a series of musical incentives of logical reasonings, which, though being unlike, should be directed by a single dominant motive and bear the imprint of a single style.

Wherefore it appeared to me that from that great Ancient—who was most excellent in the art of elevating the human soul to the extreme height of its vigor—a grand and efficacious teaching could descend even to-day.

Scrutinizing himself and his fellow creatures, he had discovered the inestimable worth that an assiduous discipline, intent always upon a certain scope, confers upon life. His greatest wisdom seemed to me to shine in this; he did not place his ideal beyond his daily practice, beyond necessary realities, but he formed of it the living centre of his substance, and deducted from it proper laws according to which, in

the passage of years, he rhythmically developed, exercising with tranquil pride the rights that they yielded to him, separating—he too an Athenian citizen, under the tyranny of the Thirty and the tyranny of the people—with deliberate design his moral existence from that of the City.

He desired and knew how to preserve himself to himself until death. "I obey only God!" signified "I obey only the laws of that dicipline to which, for the fulfillment of my conception of order and beauty, I have subjected my free nature."

A rarer artificer than Apelles or Protogenes, he succeeded with a firm hand in describing upon a continuous line the integral image of himself, and the sublime gladness of that last night did not come to him from the hope of that other life that he had represented in discourse, but rather from the vision of his own likeness that completed itself with death.

Ah, why to-day, in some Latin land, does not the Master come to life again, who, with an art so profound and hidden knew how to awaken and excite all the energies of the intellect and the mind in as many as approached him to listen?

During the reading of the Dialogues in my youth, a strange melancholy took possession of me when I attempted to imagine that circle of eager, unquiet

disciples around him. And in fancy I admired the most beautiful of them, those robed with neatest elegance, upon whom His round, projecting eyes—those *new* eyes in which shone a glance peculiar to himself alone—rested most often.

My imagination dwelt at length upon the adventures of strangers come to him from afar—Thracian Ansistenes who walked forty miles a day to hear him, and—(the Athenians having prohibited the citizens of Megara to enter Athens, and decreed the extreme penalty for trangressors), that Euclid who garmented himself in woman's clothing, and thus attired and veiled, went forth from his city towards twilight, and after accomplishing a long march, found himself present at the colloquies of the Sage, taking his homeward way at dawn under the same mask, his breast filled with an inextinguishable enthusiasm.

And I felt moved by the fate of that young, beautiful Syrian Fedone, who, made prisoner of war in his own country, and sold to a brothel keeper, fled from the place of shame to Socrates, and obtaining through him his ransom, participated also in the feasts of pure thought.

It really seemed to me that that jovial teacher surpassed the Nazarene in generosity. Perhaps the Jew, had his enemies not killed him in the flower of his years, would have finally shaken off the weight of his

sadness, and finding a new taste in the ripe fruits of his Galilee, would have shown to his band another happiness.

The Greek had always loved life, and loving it, taught also that it should be beloved. An almost infallible prophet and foreteller, he gathered together all souls in which he discovered a force, and in each developed and exalted that native strength, so that all, endued with his flame, were revealed in their powerful diversity.

His greatest worth was in that result, that effect of which his enemies accused him: that from his school —where were assembled honest Crito and Plato and delirious Apollodorus, and that gentle Teeteto, like a noiseless-flowing streamlet of oil—went out the weak Cyrene Aristippo, and Cristia, the most violent of the Thirty Tyrants; the tyrant Caricle, and the marvelous violator of laws, Alcibiades, who knew no bounds to his meditated license.

"When I hear the discourses of this fellow, my heart beats more rapidly than at the frantic priests of Cybele," said the graceful, spirited son of Clinia, as crowned with ivy and violets, he interwove the most brilliant eulogy with which a man may ever be deified on earth, at the conclusion of a banquet where from the mouth of Silenus he had gathered the grand initiation of Diotima.

Now what energies would such a master have stimulated in me? What logical sequences would he have conducted me to find?

First, he would have captivated my mind by that choice faculty he possessed of feeling also the fascination of frail beauty, of distinguishing common, daily pleasures with a certain aim, and of recognizing the value that the idea of death confers upon the charm of earthly things.

Pure and austere as ever, like many others in the act of speculation he, however, possessed senses so exquisite that they could almost be called the refined artificers of his sensations.

According to that perfect judge, Alcibiades, there was never any one at the banquets who knew how to enjoy them as did the great Sage.

At the commencement of the Feast of Xenophon he, with the others, contemplated for a long time in silence the perfect beauty of Autolycus, almost with the recognition of a superhuman presence, and with subtle taste he discussed in continuance perfumes, beverages and the dance, ornamenting his discourse with vivid images till it became half essay, half poem.

Laughingly rivaling therein the charms of Critobulo, he came out with the lascivious words: "Although my lips are swollen and protuberant, do you not be-

lieve that my kiss perhaps may be softer than thine own?"

To the Syracusan, who with his boy harp-player was giving exhibitions with two young girls—a wonderful dancer and flutist—Socrates recommended that the three young bodies should no longer be urged to rough efforts, and perilous prodigality, which did not confer pleasure, but to leave their childish freshness to assume under the inspiring flute tones, the true attitudes of the Graces, the Hours, and the Nymphs of famous paintings.

Thus to the disorder which amazes, he opposed the order which delights, revealing himself once again a devotee of music and a master of style.

But his last attitude towards a beautiful, beloved, frail, living thing was that which most touched me in that far-off time, and which still affects me, inasmuch as in its voluptuous melancholy and its passionate perplexity my soul sometimes likes to relax the tension, that in a life of noble elegancy can produce the sentiment of continual transformation, continual passing away, continual perishing.

In the conference of the last evening, where Critone, charged by him who was to proffer the cup of hemlock, interrupted the discourse of the dying man with the warning not to become heated did he wish

the poison to have rapid effect, the intrepid philosopher smiled and proceeded with his investigations; but that point does not disturb me, nor is the musical similitude of the prophetic swans and their harmonious jubilee sweet to me, nor am I astonished by those extreme moments in which the man completed his perfection, so lucidly with brief acts and brief words, and like the artificer who has given to his work the last touch, finally—a perfect miracle of character — beheld content only his own image which would make immortal poetry on earth, but I am transported, and charmed by the unforeseen pause that followed the doubts opposed by Cebete and Simmia to the certainty manifested by the eloquent Teacher.

A profound pause that, in which the souls of all present sank blindly, suddenly into a bottomless depth where all at once the ray of light pointed towards the Mystery by him about to enter it, became extinguished.

The master guessed the sadness of that sudden darkness to his faithful followers, and for an instant the wings of his Idea were lowered. Reality represented itself to him in the senses, and held him yet for a time in the field of the finite and the perceptible. He felt time hurrying on, life flowing out. Perhaps his ears caught some rumor of the magnifi-

cent city; perhaps his nostrils breathed the perfume of the new-coming summer, as his eyes rested on beautiful, bearded Fedone.

When he was seated upon the bed, and beside him on a low stool was Fedone, the Philosopher placed his hand upon the disciple's head and caressed him, fondling the thick beard upon the neck, as was his sportive habit of finger-play within that rich young forest.

He did not speak for a time, so intense and marked with delight was his emotion, but by means of this beautiful, living, weak thing he communicated once more with the earthly life in which he had accomplished his perfection, and in which he had effected his ideal of virtue, and he felt that perhaps after all, there was nothing beyond, that his finished existence was enough unto itself, that prolongation in the eternal might be nothing but an appearance—like the halo of a star—produced by the extraordinary splendor of his humanity.

Never had the beautiful tresses of the youth of Elide had for him so sublime a value; he enjoyed them for the last time knowing that he must die, and also he knew that on the morrow they would be cut off in token of mourning.

Finally he spoke, and never before in his voice had his disciples known such a sound, as he said:

"To-morrow, oh Fedone, thou wilt cut off these beautiful locks."

"So it seems, oh Socrates! It is destiny!" answered the bearded youth, chokingly.

This sentiment, which at once became exalted in me, when I read the episode for the first time in the Platonic dialogue, afterwards came to me so often in complex analogies that I made it the open or closed theme of the harmonious sequences to which I wished to pay attention.

Thus the Ancient taught me the commemoration of death in a mode suitable to my nature, in order that I might find a rarest worth and gravest significance in those things near to me.

And he taught me to search and discover both the sincere virtues and defects of my nature, to dispose of the one and the other according to a premeditated design, to give with patient care a decorous appearance to this, and to elevate that towards highest perfection.

And he also taught me to exclude all that could alter the lines of my ideal, all that was unlike my directing idea, or that could retard and interrupt the rhymthmical development of my thought.

From him I learned to recognize with sure intuition those minds upon which to exercise kindness

or mastery, or from which to obtain some extraordinary revelation; and finally he communicated his faith to me in the Demon, which was nothing else but the mysteriously significant power of character, inviolable even by one's self.

Solitary and filled with such teaching, I set myself to work, with the hope of succeeding, and determining by a precise outline, that representation of myself, to whose actuality so many remote causes, operating from time immemorial through an infinite series of generations, had contributed.

The value of extraction, of race, that which in the country of Socrates is named *eugenéia*, revealed itself to me more valiantly, the sterner the rigor of my discipline became, and pride and content grew apace together in me when I reflected that too many minds under such a severe, fiery proof, would sooner or later have revealed their vulgar essence.

But sometimes from the very roots of my body—there where sleeps the indestructible soul of my ancestors—unexpectedly surged up such jets of energy vehement and direct, that I became saddened, recognizing their uselessness in an epoch in which public life is only a miserable spectacle of baseness and dishonor.

"It is certainly wonderful," said the demon to me, "that these ancient barbarian forces should be pre-

served in thee with so much freshness. They are still beautiful though importunate, but in another time they would have been of worth to thee in recovering that duty suitable for thy equals, the duty of him who should indicate a certain goal, and guide followers towards it. As the day for that accomplishment seems afar off, thou seekest for the moment, condensing these forces, to transform them into living poesy."

That day did indeed seem distant, inasmuch as the arrogance of the people was not so great as the cowardice of those who tolerated and favored it. Living in Rome, I was the witness of the most ignominious violations, the most obscene unions that had ever dishonored a sacred place.

Like malefactors in the enclosure of an infamous forest, the evil-doers assembled within the fatal circle of the divine city, which seemed as if it could not raise itself anew, amid so many boundless ghosts of imperial rule, unless dominated by some magnificent power, armed by a thought more brilliant than all memories.

Ever more putrid and more swollen, never traversed by the gigantic, perverse flame of ambition, never lightened even by the flash of a beautiful crime, the wave of base desires invaded squares and the meeting places of streets, like the bubbling up of sewers.

In its distance beyond the Tiber, the solitary dome, inhabited by a feeble soul, strong in the knowledge of his aims, always shone out in contrast to that other dome above, uselessly sublime, where a king of warrior race gave a most admirable example of patience, fulfilling the humble and annoying office assigned to him by the decree of the people.

On the Quirinal Acropolis, sentinelled by the Tindaridi twins, one September evening, while a huge, compact crowd commemorated with bestial howls, a conquest, whose frightful immensity I knew not—(Rome was terrible as a crater, under a mute conflagration of clouds)—I thought silently, "what a dream these incendiaries of the Latin sky could raise in the great heart of a King! Such a one that under its weight the giant horses of Praxiteles would bend like straw. Ah, who would ever know how to embrace that Ancient Mother, and make her fruitful, with his all-powerful thought?

"To her alone—to her bosom of stone which for centuries was the pillow of Death—to her alone is given to generate such life that the whole world will once again be impregnated with it."

And in my imagination I saw behind the flaming panes of the royal balcony, a pallid, contracted forehead upon which, as upon the Corso, was engraved the sign of a superhuman destiny.

But what availed that turbid boiling of servile passions like an infernal stream, considered through the silence which is diffused for nine circuits about Rome?

The sublime spectacle of the Agro, sown with the grandest dead things, and capable of producing nothing but wiry grass, fever germs and formidable thoughts, consoled me, however, for every disgust.

"Moves a new nation within the city walls?" its vast expanse seemed to murmur, "after a time the breeze will bring me yet more ashes for my barren desert is composed of the heaped dust of sepulchred nations, of dust both precious and pitiful, and the iron has not yet been taken from the mountain for the plow that shall furrow me."

However, if the spectacle of that voracious desert is a sinister warning for a vain people, it is for the hermit or the thinker, the inspiration of the most unrestrained intoxication that can ever involve a human soul. From the fissures of the soil a febrile vapor steams that operates like a philter upon the blood of certain men, producing a species of heroic madness dissimilar to any other.

Invaded by such a madness it appeared to me were the Garibaldian bands of youths when they entered the Agro, burning with an ardor that at once transformed them to fire, until they seemed so many blaz-

ing twigs, while in some that fever so magnified the inner fancy that they ceased to be part of a compact and harmonious throng, and assumed each in his own person, an aspect of single combat, consecrated to exploits most new to him.

Some, of noble race, and beautiful as a hero-virgin of the days of Ajax, seemed, when they fell, to renew in themselves the type of ancient warlike ideality, augmented by a fervor unequalled that became a part of them, as they rushed onward over that historic soil.

I envied them the favorable opportunity which I lacked, for, more than once, after an exalted meditation, and devoured by a furious need of proofs, I dashed my horse against a too high heap of stones and surpassing the useless peril, felt that I would have always and in whatever situation, known how to die.

I remember, as one of the most intense periods of my life, a past Autumn of daily communion with this Latin desert, the Roman campagna.

Over that theatre, where before my mind's eye was developed a drama of races, the cloud changes, represented by great shadows, irresolute, inconstant, were passing, a perpetual annotation to my inward pretenses. Sometimes the silence was so

sombre, and the odor of the dead on the putrid dog's-grass blew so suffocatingly in my face, that I instinctively clung closer to my horse, almost wishing to become a part of his impetuous vitality. The beautiful, powerful animal stretched himself out like a panther, communicating to me the inextinguishable flame that burned in his pure blood. Then animation filled me for some minutes, and developing thought and the impetus of the race together in a parallel line to the gigantic vertebra of the aqueducts towards the clogged horizon, I felt born and dilate within me an indescribable fervor, mixed with a physical orgasm, of intellectual pride and confused hope, and my energies were favored and multiplied by the presence of those works of men, those surviving human testimonies of total death, those formidable, reddish arches that for centuries have ridden in an invincible chain against the menace of the sky.

All alone there, without kindred, with no common ties whatever with anyone or anything, independent of every familiar authority, absolute master of myself and my happiness, I felt most profoundly then in that solitude,—as in no other time and in no other place,—the sentiment of my progressive and voluntary individualization towards an ideal Latin type.

I felt my being grow and become determined in its own characteristics, in its distinct peculiarities from

day to day, under the assiduous force of meditation, assertion and exclusion. The aspect of the *campagna*, so grave and precise in its situations and its coloring, was a continual example and continual stimulus to me, having for my intellect the efficacy of a sentential teaching. Each development of lines in fact, inscribed itself upon the sky with the brief signification of an engraved sentence, and with the constant imprint of a unique style.

But the admirable virtue of that teaching lay in this: that while it brought me in my inner life to obtain the exactitude of a studied design, it did not quench or dry up the spontaneous sources of emotion and of dreams, but rather excited them to a higher activity.

Suddenly, perhaps, a single thought like a pleasing form created by an illusion, would come to me so intense and so ardent, that I became impassioned almost to delirium, and all my world was spread with shadows and new lights: a jet of poetry broke out from my inmost emotions, filling my soul with music and ineffable freshness and desires, and hopes raised up in happy boldness.

Sometimes the autumn sunset poured the impalable lava of its eruptions over the Agro Romano: long, sulphurous currents furrowed the unequal plain, the lowlands, like yawning gulfs, filled with darkness,

while the acqueducts kindled in fire from base to summit; all the landscape turned back to its volcanic origin in the dawn of time.

Sometimes of a morning the skylarks suddenly started in a giddy ascension from the soft sparkling grass, singing like spirits of joy, ever higher and higher, transported, enwrapped in purest azure, invisible to human eyes, and to my astonished soul all the dome of heaven echoed to their tuneful intoxication.

More than all else then, that solitude could give the degree of frivolity and the degree of reason necessary to an ambitious ascetic, an ascetic who, renewing the original sense of the word austere, wished to prepare himself, like the ancient gladiators, with rigid discipline for earthly struggles and dominations.

"What arduous march, what fiery desert, what inaccessible summit, what bottomless cavern, what fever-marsh, what spot more naked, tragic and solitary can surpass this in the virtue of kindling the sacred spark of enthusiasm in one who believes himself destined to engrave upon new tables of the law a new code for the religious soul of the people?"

My thoughts were wont to take this ruminative style, while the presentiments of uncreated forms arose in me, favored by that same silence in which

so many extinct representations of our humanity were assembled.

"All is death here," I thought to myself, "but all can suddenly come to life again in a spirit that may have a warmth and redundance sufficient to accomplish the miracle. How to imagine the grandeur and the terror of such a resurrection?

He whose conscience could conceive it, would appear to himself and to others invaded by a mysterious and incalculable force greater yet than that which assailed the ancient Pitia. The fury of a priestess in the tripod would not speak from his mouth, but rather the funereal genius itself of guardian races, of innumerable destinies already completed. His oracle would not be a tiny aperture opened towards a too perceiving world, but the admonition of all human wisdom mixed with the Earth breath, the first prophesy according to the word of Aeschylus.

And once again the multitudes would bow before the divine seeming of his madness, not as in Delphi, to solicit the unknown decrees of the obscure god, but to receive the clear response of a former life, the response that the Nazarene, by reason of his ignorance, did not give.

The desert that he had chosen, away under the mountains of Judea, on the western shores of the Dead Sea, was too stony for him to find his revela-

tion there: a place of rocks and crags and abysses, lacking all trace or sign of footsteps or human life, hidden, indeed, and blind in every thought. The young hermit feared not the greedy dogs of the Orient, but he dreaded deliberation and reflection: his emaciated hand knew how to soften the wild beasts, but an ardent, dominating thought, such as those that wander in this Latin desert, would have devoured him.

When the Spirit of all Evil drew him to the mountain top, pointing out to him the direction of the various kingdoms of the world, indicating the fertile countries underneath, and the profound, whirlpool currents of human desire, the young Nazarene closed his eyelids, he did not wish to see, he did not wish to know.

But the Revealer must extend the horizon of his conscience beyond every limit, and embrace days, years, centuries and milleniums, that his truth, emanating from the apex of life lived by man up to the present hour, may be a fire in which the rising energies of the greatest number of generations may be gathered, harmonized and multiplied, to continue ever more straightforwardly and more unanimously towards purer ideality.

Sometimes, too, the ghost of him who one day be-

lieved to have created a new King of Rome, accompanied me.

"Ah," I thought, "this most admirable reviver of heroic will, this gay vintager of youthful blood needed a rigid exercise here upon the sepulchre of nations."

Had he been able for a time to tear his spirit from the things which pursued it, and incline it towards things immobile, he would have perhaps discovered a grander ideal than his mortal person, and would have selected it directress of his achievements.

Thus his dream of a Latin empire would have been condensed, and made strong and tenacious, so that the force of events and even he himself would not have been able to dissipate and destroy it, as had ever been the case.

But his idea, too human, too much a part of his daily life, was obliged to die with him. He could not know the secret by which the energy of a deed is prolonged through time. Most vehement were the impulses which moved the man, but their propagation and extension was brief and uncertain, as they originated in a centre of spontaneous power, that was subject to no superior conception formed from a severe order of meditations.

His work, therefore, was not superior to himself, and lasted only as long as could a massacre. The old oracles regulated his destiny: the response of

Pitia pronounced about the fate of Corinth could after milleniums apply equally to him:

"An eagle has conceived upon a rock, and will bring forth a most savage lion who, eager for human flesh, will work great bloodshed!"

He only obeyed this destiny like the little tyrant Cipselo, and the King of Rome vanished vain-gloriously like a thread of smoke.

Of such a color were the thoughts awakened in me by the aspect of a place that in the words of Dante was by nature itself disposed to universal empire: *ad universaliter principandum*, and while my memory reflected over the Dantesque arguments that demonstrate the right to the Roman domination, the summit of my intellect was occupied by the exact and rigid form of that sentence, which if the Latin people were willing to revive, should be adopted as a rule of their life institutions. *Maxime nobili, maxime præsse convenit;* "to the supremely noble should be dedicated supreme existences."

And accompanied by that grand and tyrannical spirit I ruminated, "Oh venerable father of our speech, thou hadst faith in the necessity of hierarchies and differences among men; thou believedst in the superiority of virtue transported in the blood by hereditary right; thou believedst firmly in a virtue of races, that could by degree, choice after choice

elevate man to the highest splendor of his moral beauty, and expounding the genealogy of Æneas, thou sawest in the competition of blood a certain divine predestination.

Now by what mysterious concourse of muses, by what vast experience of culture, by what favorable agreement of circumstances will arise the new King of Rome? *Natura ordinatus ad imperandum*, ordered by nature to command, but unlike any other monarch, he will not come to confirm or raise values, that the populace,—under the influx of various doctrines have too long been accustomed to give to the things of life, but he will come the rather to abolish and invert them. Knowing all the significations of the cases which compose the history of men, and having penetrated to the essence of all sovereign wills that determined great movements, he will be able to perfectly construct and cast into the future that ideal bridge upon which at length the privileged races can pass over the abyss that to-day seems to divide them from the wished-for empire.

And this image of the king, among all the images which the sacred soil expressed, and my soul contained, was sometimes so visible to me that it appeared almost a created form, and I contemplated it ardently, while sudden, unlooked-for ideas of indescribable beauty illumined my understanding, and

then became darkened, perhaps never to shine forth again.

Thus the Roman Campagna with its severe teaching incited me to follow the full bent of my manhood and force, to assert my inward sovereignty, to draw with a firm hand that circumferential line of which, according to Leonardo, human beauty is engendered, and I asked myself at the end of each day, "By what new thoughts has my treasure been increased? What new energies have been developed from my body? What new possibilities have I beheld within?"

And I wished that each day should bear the impress of my character, should be distinguished by a sign of vigorous art, by some proud emblem of victory proffering me the familiarity of Thucydides, the example of his Athenian generals, who constantly made a beautiful and precise sermon and then combatting with all their forces, raised up at length a trophy on the field.

Once at twilight I heard voices similar to those of eunuchs, repeating ever and ever more often, from far and near, an irksome wailing whose burden was "*Cui bono?* What is the sense, what is the worth of life? Why live? Why wear one's self out? All efforts are useless, all is vanity and grief. One after another we should kill our passions and designedly

wrench out by the roots the hope and desire which are the cause of life. Renunciation, complete unconsciousness, the dissolution of all dreams, absolute annihilation—this is the final liberation!"

It was a miserable people afflicted with leprosy, that foul disease which the ancient Persians, as ever fresh old Herodotus narrates, attributed to faults committed *against the Sun,* whom in fact that servile nation had offended.

A part of the suffering band, hoping to become cleansed, plunged into the great devotional basins, and there in much repentance eased and weakened themselves, but the spectacle was none the less disusting, and as I turned my head away, a superb joy moved the precordiums in me to think that my eyes, unshadowed by tears, could perceive all outlines and all colors, that my watchful, healthy ears heard all sounds, and all rhythms, that my spirit could enjoy without limit all illusory appearances, and knew how to create in itself other melancholy, and to find life's most precious prize precisely in the rapidity of its metamorphoses and in the denseness of its mysteries.

"Oh Manifold Beauty of the World!" I prayed, "not to thee alone goes up my praise, not to thee alone, but also to my ancestors, to them who in remote centuries knew how to enjoy thee, and have trans-

mitted to me their rich, fervid blood. Praised be they now and forever for the beautiful wounds they have opened, for the beautiful fires they resuscitated, for the beautiful cups that they emptied, the beautiful garments they wore, the beautiful saddle-horses they fondled, the beautiful women they enjoyed—for all their havoc, their madnesses, their magnificences, and their luxuries, be they praised, because thus in me was formed those senses in which thou canst vastly and deeply mirror thyself, O Beauty of the World, as in five vast deep seas!"

In the meantime, poets, discouraged and bewildered, after having exhausted the riches of rhyme in evoking images of former times, in bewailing their dead illusions, and in numbering the colors of the fallen leaves, asked, some with irony, some without: "What shall be our duty to-day? Ought we to exalt universal suffrage in double-sixes? Ought we, with the anxiety of decasyllabics, to hasten the fall of the king, the advent of republics, the accession of the people to power? Is there not in Rome, as there was in Athens, some demagogue lyre-maker Cleophon? For a modest recompense we could, with the same instruments tuned by him, persuade the incredulous that in the many there is strength, right, thought, wisdom, light . . . .?"

But not one of them, more generous and more ardent, arose to reply.

"Defend Beauty! This is your sole office, defend the dream that is in you! Because to-day mortals no longer honor and reverence the pupil-poets of the Muse that they prefer, as the Odyssey tells of, defend yourselves with arms, and even with ridicule if this is worth more than invective. Attentively irritate the points of your scorn with the most pungent poisons, make your sarcasms to have such corrosive value that they will reach the marrow and destroy it, brand to the bone the stupid foreheads of those who would wish to put upon the human soul an exact mark like a social utensil, and to make all humanity to resemble nail-heads under the percussion of the nail-hammer.

"Your frantic laughs ascend to heaven when you hear the stablemen of the Great Beast cry aloud in the assembly, therefore proclaim and demonstrate for the glory of Intelligence that their sayings are not lower than those indecent sounds with which the villager expels from his mouth the wind from a stomach gorged with vegetables.

"Proclaim and demonstrate that their hands to which your father Dante would give the same epithet that he bestowed upon the nails of Thais, are adapted to pick up manure, but unworthy to be raised for the sanction of a law in the Assembly.

"Defend the Thought that they menace, the Beauty they are outraging!

"A day will come in which they will attempt to burn the books, to break the statues, to rend the canvases; defend the ancient, free-handed work of your masters and the future of your disciples against the rage of drunken slaves.

"Do not be disheartened, being few, you possess the supreme science and the supreme force of the world—speech. An order of words can surpass the murderous efficacy of a chemical formula.

"Resolutely oppose destruction with destruction!"

And the patricians, deprived of authority in the name of equality, considered as shadows of a world forever disappeared, most unfaithful to their race, and ignorant or unmindful of the arts of dominion professed by their ancestors, also asked each other, "What shall be our duty to-day? Shall we deceive time and ourselves seeking to nourish among withered memories some feeble hope under revolutions too great for our reduced breathing, and storied with bloody mythology?

"Or shall we recognize the great dogma of '89, open the portals of our courtyards to popular favor,

crown our marble balconies with lights at the Feasts of State, become partners of Hebrew bankers, exercise our little part of sovereignty in filling the poll ticket of the vote with the names of our go-betweens, our tailors, our hat-makers, our shoe-makers, our usurers and our lawyers?"

One of them, ill disposed to peaceful renunciation, elegant tedium, or sterile irony, answered:

"Discipline yourselves like your race-horses, and await events. Learn the method of maintaining and strengthening your person as you have learned that for success in the hippodrome, compel your will to act in a direct line, all your energies towards a firm scope, and even your most tumultuous passions and your most turbid vices.

"Be convinced that the essence of individuality surpasses all accessory attributes in value, and that inner sovereignty is the principal sign of the aristocrat. Believe only in strength tempered by long discipline. Strength is the first law of nature, indestructible, incapable of being abolished. Discipline is the superior virtue of the free man.

"The world can be constituted only upon strength, as much in the centuries of civilization as in the epochs of barbarism. If all earthly races were destroyed by an earthly deluge, and new generations

came forth from the stones as in the ancient fable, mankind, scarcely out of the earth generator, would beat each other until one, the most powerful, succeeded in commanding the others.

"Wait then and prepare yourselves for the event. Fortunately a State erected on the basis of popular suffrage and equality, and cemented by fear, is not only an ignoble construction, but also a precarious one.

"The State should be only an institution perfectly adapted to favor the gradual elevation of a privileged class towards an ideal form of existence. Upon the economical and political equality to which the democracy aspire, you will go ahead forming a new oligarchy, a new kingdom of strength, and though in few, you will succeed sooner or later in retaking the reins, to command the multitudes to your advantage.

"It will not be greatly difficult to you in truth to reconduct the masses to obedience: plebeians remain ever slaves, having a native need of extending their wrists for the manacles; until the termination of centuries they will never have within themselves the sentiment of liberty.

"Do not let yourselves be deceived by their vociferations, and unseemly contortions, but remember always that Panic controls the soul of a Crowd. It will be well for you then upon occasion, to provide

whips that hiss, to assume an imperious aspect, to invent some pleasing stratagem.

"That diverse genius Ulyssees, when he passed over the field to reduce all in the tribunal, cried out in rebuke, if he met some shouting plebeian, 'Be quiet thou coward, thou faint-hearted, thou nobody in the counsels!' and with that he chastized him with the sceptre of imperial power.

"The noble demagogue Alcibiades, more skilled than all others in the government of the Grand Beast, thus commenced one of his harangues for the taking of Sicily: 'Command awaits me, O Athenians, more than it does others, and of the command I esteem myself worthy.' But no teaching in truth is more profound and more opportune for you than that offered by Herodotus in the beginning of the book of Melpomene. This it is:

"'The Scythians, twenty-eight years away from home in the subjugation of Greater Asia, after such a long interval wished to return to their native land, but encountered there a no less difficulty and danger than they had endured in war, for a great hostile army prevented their entrance into the country. The fact was that the Scythian women, deprived of their husbands for so long a time, gave themselves to their servants, and from the servants and these women had issued a generation of youths who, con-

scious of their own origin, set themselves resolutely against these returners from Media, and obstructed the way with a pit that extended from the Taurus mountains to the Meotide Marsh, a large, vast stretch.

"'Then they held themselves in readiness to valiantly repel the attempted assault of the Scythians, and the latter, after various conflicts, saw that they could in no way advance with arms. One of them then said quietly:

"'"O Scythians, why do we remain here laboring in this manner? In combating with our servants we teach them too much of subtle finesse, and if we kill them we decrease the number of our future subjects.

"'"Therefore I would advise to cast aside spear and lance and javelin, and each one of us brandish instead his horsewhip, in this manner insulting these people. Perhaps until now, having seen us proceed against them with arms, they certainly believed to be our equals, and the sons of our equals, but when instead of arms they see the horsewhip, they will soon feel that they are our servants, and convinced of their state they will no longer know how to resist us."

"'After hearing this discourse the Scythians followed its counsel, and the adversaries, cruelly smitten with the new truth, ceased combat and betook themselves to flight.

"'In this way the Scythians returned to their native land.'

"Meditate upon it, O ye rulers without dominion!"

Perhaps in my laborious solitude—if, indeed, I did not fear sickness nor dementia nor death possessing this guardian flame of pride, of thought and of faith—my melancholy sometimes concealed within itself a real need of communion with the fraternal spirit not yet met, or with an assembly of minds predisposed to passionately interest themselves in all that passionately interested me. Such a need, however, seemed to reveal itself to me in my mental habit of establishing the theories of ideas and images in a concrete oratorical or lyrical form, almost as if in view of an imaginary auditor. Burning streams of eloquence and of poetry inundated me all of a sudden, so that to my overflowing soul the silence at times became too grave.

To comfort my solitude I thought then of giving a corporeal figure to that demon, in which, according to the document of my first master, I had faith as in the infallible token that led me to the integration of my moral effigy. I thought of committing to a beautiful and imperious mouth, colored with my own blood, the duty of repeating to me, "Be thou what thou oughtst to be."

Among the likenesses of my ancestors was one which above all others was dear to me, and sacred as a votive icon.

It was the most noble and the most vivid flower of my race, represented by the brush of a divine artist—the portrait of Alessandro Cantelmo, Count of Volturara—painted by Vinci between the years 1493 and '94 at Milan, where Alessandro had taken a room with his company of men-at-arms, attracted by the unheard of magnificences of that Sforza who wished to make of the Lombard city a new Athens.

Nothing in the world has an equal worth for me, and no treasure was ever watched with more passionate jealousy, and I never tire of thanking fortune that she has seen fit to brighten my life with such a famous picture, and to grant to me the incomparable voluptuousness of such a secret.

"If thou possessest a thing of beauty, remember that every glance of others usurps thy possession. The enjoyment of contemplation shared is lessened, and thou must refuse it. Some never enter a public museum that their contemplation may not be sullied by the gaze of unknown observers. Now if thou truly possessest a thing of beauty, close it within seven doors, and cover it with seven veils."

The ancient counsel haunted me, and the magnetic figure was covered with a veil, but its attraction was

so profound, and its flame so powerful, that sometimes the very canvas seemed to palpitate to the vehemence of respiration.

I gave, therefore, to the demon the form of this familiar genius, and in the solitude, I felt it live a life even more intense than my own. Had I not before me, through a lasting miracle, one of the greatest revealers of the world? Had I not before me an heroic spirit issued from my own root, and constituted of all of those distinctive characteristics of the race which I sought so acutely to discover in myself, and that in it appeared with a fierceness of relief almost frightful?

There it was before me, always the same, always new! Such a body was not the prison of the soul but its faithful image. Every line of the almost beardless countenance was as precise and firm as in persistently chiselled bronze; the skin covering with a dim pallor the lean muscles, which in desire or wrath were sure to make themselves known in a fierce thrill; the nose was straight and rigid, the chin large-boned and narrow, the lips sinuous but energetically closed, expressing rash desires, while the eye-gleam like a beautiful sword, was shaded by a head of hair dense and heavy and almost as violet-black as the bunches of grapes that the sun inflames upon a too fearless branch.

The figure was standing, visible from the knees up, immovable and yet at the first instant imagination could readily picture the quick leap of the strong, flexible limbs like steel, that would fling out that beautiful body and make it a peril to its neighbors, at the first hint of an enemy.

"*Cave Adsum!*" well did the ancient teaching befit him!

Attired in lightest armor, damasked by a superior workman, he had his hands bare; pallid, sensitive hands, but yet with a something, I know not what, of the tyrannical and the murderous in their clear outlines.

The left one was leaning upon the gorgon of the sword hilt, the right against the massive corner of a table covered with thick velvet of which a hem appeared, while near the gauntlets and the helmet, a statuette of Pallas rested, and a pomegranate which bore upon its stem both its pointed leaf and its glowing flower.

Behind the head, somewhat far off, through the emptiness of a window space, a champaign unclothed itself, terminated by a cluster of hills of which one cone was prominent like a superb thought, and beneath, upon a scroll, might be read this couplet:

"*Frons viridis ramo antiquo et flos ignevs vno Tempore* (*Prodigivm*) *frvctvs et vber inest.*"

In what place and upon what occasion had Alessandro met for the first time the Florentine master who was then attaining to the greatest splendor of his manhood? Was it perhaps at one of the feasts of Ludovico, replete with the marvels created by the Magician's occult arts, or rather in the palace of Cecilia Gallerani where military men conversed about warlike science, musicians sang, architects and painters projected designs, philosophers discussed the laws of nature, and poets recited their own and others' compositions "in the presence of this heroine" as old Bandello narrates? Precisely here it pleases me to imagine the first meeting, at the time when the favorite of the Moor had already commenced to secretly love Alessandro.

What a flame of audacious intelligence and dominating will must have been transparent in the youth's air that Leonardo should have been captivated with him from that day!

Perhaps Alessandro discussed with him secretly "upon the modes of ruining every rock or other fortress not founded upon stone," and so became impassioned with the formidable secrets of that fascinating creator of Madonnas whose novelty of genius surpassed all masters and all inventors of warlike machines; perhaps in the course of the argument Leonardo proffered some one of his profound thoughts

upon the art of life, and scrutinizing the eyes of the silently sympathetic youth, recognized in him a mind well calculated to draw from life all that it could give to him, an ambitious man not disposed to follow fortune blindly, but to conquer its dominion with the aid of that science that multiplies the forces of the operator, and converges them towards a scope.

And he who some years afterward was to become the military architect of Cæsar Borgia, he who invoked and awaited a magnanimous prince who could offer him boundless means to put his numerous designs into acts, saw perhaps in the muscular patrician the future founder of a royal dynasty and loved him, placing in him the grandest hopes.

I like to imagine that the following brief record in the commentaries of Vinci (then all intent upon the studies for the equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza) refers to the evening of that first meeting.

"Penultimate day of April, 1492, heavy jennet of Messer Alessandro Cantelmo's. Has a fine neck and sufficiently good head."

Going forth together from Cecilia's palace, both paused upon the road a moment in discussion, and as Leonardo perceived the jennet he approached him observingly, and stroking the beautiful neck he expressed in some spontaneous exclamations the terrible fatigue given to his unsatisfiable spirit by the continuous re-

searches about the monument with which the Moor wished to glorify the fortune of the seizer of Genoa, the father-conqueror of the dukedom, his creative hand sketching meanwhile the colossus in the air with such a broad attitude and gesture, that it was rendered visible to the internal eyes of the youth.

Day was dying, the spring twilight hour wavered on the pinnacles of the joyful city, and a company of musicians passed by singing. The horse neighed impatiently, and a heroic sentiment dilated Alessandro's soul, making it equal to the ghost of the great Captain.

"Ah," he thought, leaping into the saddle, "If I could set out for my conquest!"

And because in reality he set out only for some of the cares of ordinary life, he said suddenly, in impetuous bitterness:

"Does it seem to you, Master Leonardo, that life is worth while to a man in my state?"

And Leonardo, whom the unexpected words did not astonish, made answer:

"All that is lacking is for the eagle to take his first flight!"

And perhaps the beardless cavalier, who was withdrawing with his people, seemed to the artist to have been made king by nature, as those born in a beehive are leaders of bees.

The following morning a servant conducted the jennet as a gift to the sculptor, together with the salutations of his lord.

Thus I imagine the beginning of the mutual liberality between them; the master compensating the disciple with true wealth, because "that which can be lost is not to be called riches."

Like Socrates he gave the preference to disciples adorned with rare elegance, and ornamented with fine heads of hair; like Socrates he excelled in the art of elevating the human soul to the extreme degree of its vigor. For some time Alessandro was certainly the chosen one in the Leonardo Vinci Academy, where little by little a noble spiritual seed unfolded itself under a teaching which drew its warmth from a central truth like an unobscured sun.

"Nothing can be loved or hated if first one has not the knowledge of it. The love of anything is the child of the knowledge of it, and the love is ever more fervent as the knowledge is more certain and complete." This is found in the Master's diary of a certain date, and here and there in the interrupted commentaries of Leonardo may be found the signs of that passionate curiosity with which the indefatigable experimenter watched the precious soul of his young friend. He had no secrets from him, wishing to co-operate with all his means in the increasing

of accumulated powers, so that future action in a vast field might be rendered more efficacious.

He noted down, as a reminder to himself, "Speak to Volturara about such a mode of throwing javelins." And again, "Show Volturara methods of raising and placing bridges, ways of burning and throwing down those of the enemy, and how bombardments and bastions may be placed by day and night." Or perhaps this, "Messer Alessandro wishes to give me Valturio on 'The Military Kings,' and Deche and Lucrezio 'On the Laws of Nature.'"

As the short, audacious sayings of the young man would strike him, he would jot some of them down.

"Messer Alessandro says that it befits one to seize fortune immediately she presents herself, for if we are not ready she soon tires of waiting."

Another extract says:

"Volturara impudently remarks, 'I am down upon the book to divide the streams in several branches and make them fordable. On my faith, Cyrus of Cambyses must have understood well how to do the same thing to the river Ginde for having stolen a white horse from under him.'"

One day when I imagine they both met in the magnificent house of Cecilia Gallerani, and Leonardo had enraptured all souls present by playing upon a new

lyre he had manufactured in the form of a horse's skull of almost pure silver, the reincarnated Sappho caused a wonderful small trunk, rich with enamel and gems, to be brought, which the duke had sent to her as a gift.

Displaying it to all present she asked of each, what in his judgment could be a precious enough object to be deposited therein, each one expressing a diverse opinion.

"And you, Messer Alessandro?" questioned Madonna Cecilia with sweet eyes, and the audacious youth replied.

"An ancient Alexander wishes to make this coffer, found among Darius's treasures, and than which nothing richer has ever been seen, the keeper and guardian of Homer's Iliad."

Vinci immediately noted down the answer in his memoirs, commenting thus, "one can see that he is nourished with the marrow and nerves of a lion."

Upon another day, when they were both in the garden of the same hostess, Alessandro withdrew himself somewhat apart, after a long argument with some of those "famous minds" to trace out a certain new thought which had sprung into being in that

of his so dense with germs. The beautiful

ed to him several times before he became

nd turned tardily to acknowledge her

summons, and to a gracious reproof or perhaps a pungent witticism he smilingly replied,

"Madame, a fixed star does not turn."

That evening when he inscribed this response in his diary, Vinci commented upon it with the prophecy, "he will soon take his first flight, filling the universe with amazement, all writings with his fame, and the place where he was born with eternal glory."

Perhaps that same evening, considering the intensity and the multiplicity of that precocious young life, the painter's mind, naturally inclined to occult significations, emblems and allegories, conceived the beautiful symbol of the epitomized pomegranate that carried upon its stem both the pointed leaf and the glowing flower.

But upon the 9th day of July, 1495, three days after the battle of Fornovo, the artist noted down in his book, these words.

"Volturara died on the field by the hand of his equal, and no blind steel in all the world ever cut down grander hopes!"

Thus lived and died the hero youth in whom appeared to be exalted the genuine virtue of my military race, and such seemed to me to be revealed in the effigy handed down through posterity to a far-off heir by the genius of the artificer nick-named Prometheus.

multiple energy that within to-morrow, a century or indefinite time could establish itself with a sublime manifestation.

"But you hope that it may be to-morrow," I continued soliloquizing, "treble then will be your task, in as much as you have the gift of poetry, and you study to acquire the science of words. Treble then your task! Conduct your being with upright method to the perfect integrity of the Latin type, to bring together the purest essences of your mind and reproduce the most profound vision of your universe in a sole and supreme work of art, preserve the ideal riches of your race, and your own conquests in a child, who, under the paternal teaching, recognizes them and sets them in good order in himself to become worthy of aspiring to the operation of possibilities still more elevated."

Having, then, so clearly before me the table of my laws, I tasted not only the sadness of doubt, but an anxiety that resembled fear, an anxiety new and horrible. Suppose a blind and unforeseen violence of exterior forces should hurt, deform or break my work? If I should yield and be subject to a bestial fraud of accident? If my edifice should collapse before coronation, from one of those deleterious gusts of wind that break out suddenly from the darkness!

The laurels and rose-gardens of the Villa Sciarra, which the nightingales had praised for such a long succession of nights, fell, lopped off or remained humiliated between the gates of the little gardens contiguous to the small villas of the druggists; the gigantic Ludovisian cypresses, those at "Aurora," which had once shed the solemnity of their ancient mystery upon the godlike head of Gœthe—(they remain always in my memory as I saw them on a November noon)—lay overthrown and like the slain in battle, one beside the other, with all the exhaling roots uncovered to the wan sky—those naked, black roots that seemed even yet to keep imprisoned within their enormous intricacy the ghost of a mighty life.

And over the lordly fields where in the previous spring the violets more numerous than blades of grass had appeared for the last time, pools of lime were whitening, piles of bricks reddened the scene, carts loaded with stones wheeled creakingly, alternating with the calls of the overseers and the hoarse cries of the cartmen, the brutal work which was to occupy the places sacred for so long to Beauty and to Dreams, progressed rapidly, like a wind of barbarism, that blowing over Rome threatened to wrest from it that sparkling crown of family villas to which nothing in the world is comparable for their memories and their poesy. At the Villa Albani, the men-

ace of the barbarians hung even over the box-trees that appeared as immortal as the caryatides and the pillars.

The contagion spread constantly everywhere. In the incessant contact of business, in the ferocious fury of appetites and passions, in the disordered and exclusive exercise of useful activity, every sense of decorum was lost, every respect for the great Past was laid aside; the struggle for gain was fought with an implacable spite and frenzy without any restraint. The pick-axe, the trowel and bad faith were the arms; and from one week to another, with a rapidity almost chimerical, enormous empty cages, surmounted by false entablatures, encrusted with opprobrious stucco and riddled with rectangular holes, arose upon the rubbish-filled foundations. A species of immense, whitish tumor came forth from the side of the grand old city and absorbed the life of it.

Then, day after day, when the wrangling throngs of workmen dispersed and scattered off towards the inns of the Via Salaria and the Via Nomentana, might be seen outlined against the sunsets down through the princely paths of the Villa Borghese, the glossy carriages of the newly-chosen of fortune, from whom neither barber, tailor nor bootmaker had been able to take away the ignoble imprint.

Easy to recognize were they by the insolent awk-

wardness of their attitudes and the evident uneasiness of their rapacious hands, which were hidden in gloves either too broad or too narrow, as to and fro they passed and repassed, to the sonorous trot of bays and blacks, and seemed to say:

"We are the new masters of Rome; bow down to us!"

Such, in fact, were the masters of that Rome, that dreamers and prophets, intoxicated with the ardent exhaltation of so much spilled Latin blood, had likened to the bow of Ulyssees, "One must bend it or die!" But these same men, who afar off showed themselves to be flames in the heroic sky of the not yet liberated land, now became, according to the atrocious figure of an indignant rhetorician, "avaricious fossils, good only to stamp shameful figures or indecent words upon walls."

They occupied themselves with trade—with selling, cheapening, spreading traps, no one making any more allusion to the murderous bow, and in truth it did not seem probable that the cry might rise which should cast them suddenly into fear, "O Proci, devourers of the substance of others, be warned; Ulyssees is already landed in Ithaca!"

To withdraw one's self then from the spectacle for some time was most excellent advice, and without

further leave-taking I departed with my horses and my most familiar belongings, choosing as a sojourn Rebursa, the dearest of my hereditary lands, and a spot which had been my father's favorite as well as my own mine.

It was indeed a favorable refuge for a vigorous mind, this country to which I journeyed, a location of rocky vertebra formed with singular sternness and robustness of style, which could welcome and nourish the imperious dreams of my ambitions, just as it had welcomed and nourished my father's haughty sadness after the fall of his king and the death of her who was the light of our house, our truest happiness.

And also not far from there, at Trigento, I had some friends unseen for many years, but unforgotten, to whom I was bound by pleasing recollections of boyhood and youth, and whom the thought of meeting again gladdened me.

At Trigento, in the old baronial palace surrounded by a garden almost as spacious as a park, lived these friends, the Capece Montaga, one of the most illustrious and most magnificent families of the Two Sicilies, but fallen into ruin during the ten years succeeding the misfortunes of the king, they afterwards withdrew to the last of their manor houses in the depths of this tranquil province.

The old prince of Castro-mitrano, who had enjoyed the highest honors at the courts of Ferdinand and Francesco, and who had faithfully followed the exile to Rome and beyond the Alps, never renouncing the magnificence of the happy time, dreamed away years in the shade, and vainly for years awaited the Restoration, while his premature white hairs bowed ever closer to the grave, and his offspring wasted away in dull weariness.

Only the madness of the Princess Aldoina interrupted the long anguish of waiting, and cast over it sprays of the fantastic splendor of the past, and nothing could equal in desolation the contrast between the miserable reality and the ostentatious specters and phantoms evolved from the brain of the crazy woman.

To my soul, which sought to comprehend whatever other soul might be included in the stony abode, that great family, dying out, added a sort of funeral beauty to that rocky country, but a mysterious presentiment in which my fate approached and mingled with their lonely destiny, was already born in the profoundest depths of my being.

And the names of the three marriageable princesses, Massimilla, Anatolia and Violante, resounded in my memory with a slight musical magic, as names in which appeared something vaguely visible like a dim



picture through a cloudy glass, names as expressive as countenances, which full of light and shadow, already seemed to disclose infinite grace, passion and sorrow.



II.

"Shadows and lights in their highest grace are united upon the visages of those who are seated at the doors of habitations that are dark."

—LEONARDO DA VINCI.



IT was with a feeling of sincere joy that on the road to Rebursa I recognized Oddo and Antonello Montaga, who, knowing the hour of my arrival, had come to meet me. Both embraced me heartily, gave me greeting from all at Trigento, and besieged me with a thousand questions all at once. They appeared delighted to see me, and even yet more happy when I expressed myself as intending to remain for some time in the place.

"You will stay with us of course," exclaimed Antonello, grasping my hands and almost beside himself with joy, "it will be a veritable god-send to have you."

"You must come to Trigento to-day," said Oddo interrupting his brother, "they are all waiting for you there, you must come this very evening!"

Both of them seemed to me influenced by a peculiar, almost feverish agitation, with their confused, somewhat convulsive gestures, and their rapid anxious speech, which gave them the aspect of two sick prisoners just out of confinement, and disturbed, bewildered and dazed with the first contact with a strange, new life, into which they had emerged as

from an oppressing dream. The more I looked at them the more manifest these singular signs in their persons appeared to me, and commenced to give me trouble and uneasiness.

"I do not know," I answered to their importunities, "I hardly think I can go to-night, so many hours of traveling have tired me, but to-morrow—"

I felt a vague need to be alone, to meditate and to taste that melancholy that had suddenly fallen upon me. My eyes sought to recognize the country round about, and from things near by a wave of memories came to me that the presence of the two sad beings before me hindered me from receiving.

"Well then," said Oddo, "you will come to-morrow morning to breakfast with us; may we expect you?"

"Yes, I will come."

"You cannot imagine," he added, "how they are looking for you down there."

"You had not forgotten me, then?" I asked.

"Oh no, you had forgotten us," he answered, and Antonello repeated with a little contracted smile, "you had forgotten us. It is natural—we are buried."

The accents of his voice struck me more than his words: his tones, his gestures, his glances, his acts all had a singular intensity like that of a man possessed by a mysterious disease, of one tormented by

continual hallucination, one who lived in the midst of appearances not perceptible to the senses of others, and a certain force that he made to emerge from the atmosphere that enveloped him and communicate with me in a neighborly manner, did not escape me. The effort gave something of contraction and convulsion to his whole person, and my anxiety and uneasiness increased.

"You will see our home," he added with the same smile, and almost unthinkingly and without wishing I asked,

"How is Donna Aldoina?"

Both brothers bent their head without answering.

They resembled each other very much, in fact they were twins, both long, lean and a little bent, and both had the same clear eyes, the same fine, thin beard, the same pale, nervous unquiet hands like those of hysterical people, but in Antonello the signs of weakness and disorder showed themselves more profoundly and irreparably. He was already too far gone and well-nigh lost.

I sought words in vain during the pause, a species of sad stupor took possession of me as if the whole weight of the tired body rested upon the soul. As the road coasted a chain of rocks, the trot of the horses resounding on the hard ground awoke the echoes in the deserted cavities. At the turn, the

stream shining in innumerable windings, appeared in the valley, and enclosed like an island within the meandering, lay a whitish mass of ruins.

"Isn't that Linturno there?" I questioned, recognizing the dead city.

"That is Linturno," replied Oddo. "Do you remember, we went there once together?"

"I remember."

"How much time has passed since then?"

"How much time!" I repeated; "yes, it is true."

"There is not much difference now between Linturno and Trigento," said Antonello, his hand with its sharp fingers touching his beard uncertainly while his eyes seemed to be glancing no longer at exterior things; "to-morrow you will see!"

"You discourage him," interrupted Oddo, with a slight irritation, "to-morrow he will not come."

"I will come, I will certainly come," I assured them, forcing myself to smile and to conquer the sadness which grew more intense; "I will come, and I shall find out some means to reanimate you, you seem to me a little depressed, a little worn by this solitude."

Antonello, who was seated in front of me, rested a hand on my knee, bending over to look into my eyes, while his countenance assumed an indefinable expression of dread and anxiety, as if he had found a

frightful signification in my words, and wished to question me.

And anew that white visage that approached mine, even in the light of day seemed to come forth from a world in which he alone respired, and to bring back to me the image of those emaciated spiritual faces that issue only from the mysterious depths of sacred pictures blackened by time and by the smoke of tapers.

It was only for an instant, then he drew himself back and did not speak.

"I have brought the horses with me," I added, commanding my perturbation; "we will have great rides every day. You need to bestir yourselves, shake off this laziness and ennui. How do you pass the hours?"

"In counting them," said Oddo.

"And the sisters?"

"Oh, those poor creatures!" he murmured with a tremor of tenderness in his voice, "Massimilla prays, Violante is killing herself with the perfumes that the Queen sends her, Anatolia—Anatolia is the one who makes us live, our soul, she divides herself up between us."

"And the Prince?"

"He has grown very old; he has become entirely white."

"And Don Ottavio?"

"He scarcely ever comes out of his rooms; we have almost forgotten the sound of his voice."

I was on the point of asking anew of Donna Aldoina, but restrained myself and was silent for a few moments; we were in a warm hollow of the undulated valley of the Saurgo, and I felt strongly the need of consoling my two melancholy companions, and myself.

"How precocious the spring is here," I exclaimed at random; "in February you see the first flowers—isn't that a grand privilege? You people do not know how to enjoy the things life offers you, you change a garden into a prison to torture yourselves."

"Where are the flowers?" asked Antonello with his painful smile.

We all three searched for them with our eyes, over the rough, tawny earth like a lion's mane, earth that seemed made to nourish plants of arid, tormented aspect, but that nevertheless were givers of opulent fruit.

"Here they are," I cried with a strong exultation, as I showed him a row of almonds on an eminence that had the long, noble form of a wave.

"They are on your land," said Oddo.

We were in fact in the neighborhood of Rebursa; the rocky chain with its pointed, notched summits inclined to the right, grazed by the winding Saurgo,

and raised itself by degrees to the supreme height of Mount Corace that glittered in the sun like a helmet.

To the left of the road the ground spread in undulations, like a coast covered with broad sand dunes, transforming itself not far distant into a succession of hills, reddish yellow and hunch-backed, like the camels of the desert.

"Look, look! Another row down there!" I cried, perceiving another silvery cloud light with flowers. "Do you not see, Antonello?"

He did not look so much at the almond trees as he did at me, with a timorous, astonished smile, wondering perhaps at the boyish joy which the sight of the first flowers awoke in me all at once. But what sweeter welcome could the land beloved of my father have given to me? What prettier festival pageant could that rugged country of rocky vertebra have offered to me?

"If Anatolia, Violante and Massimilla were only here!" exclaimed Oddo to whom my unforeseen animation had communicated itself, "Ah if they were here!" and his voice expressed sorrow.

"We must bring them here underneath these flowers." said Antonello, softly.

"Look, how many!" I continued, abandoning myself with more confidence to the new pleasure because I already felt to be able to transfer a part of

it at least to those poor locked-up souls, "I am happy that they are mine, Oddo."

"They must be brought underneath these flowers," repeated Antonello softly, as if dreaming.

His feverish eyes appeared to refresh themselves with the sight of those pure objects, and his low words mingled with them the indistinct images of the three sisters: "Massimilla prays, Violante is killing herself with perfumes, Anatolia is the one that makes us live, she is our soul!" . . . .

"Stop," I ordered the coachman, rising suddenly, as a sudden thought that made me singularly joyful came to me, "let us get out and go into the field, I want you to take a bundle of branches home, and make a holiday down there."

Oddo and Antonello looked at each other a little confused, a little smiling, almost timid as if before an unthought of and extraordinary fact, which dismayed them, but at the same time gave them a delicious sensation.

They had shown to me their trouble, they had revealed to me their sorrow, they had spoken to me of the sad prison from which they had come forth and which they were about to re-enter, and here on the open road I invited them to celebrate the spring, —the spring that they had forgotton, that they seemed to see for the first time after long years, and

to consider with a mixture of fear and gayety like a miracle.

"Let us descend," I cried, feeling myself no longer tired, but filled with the abundance of life and elevation of spirits that spontaneous acts of generosity bestow. I gave myself liberally to those two needy friends. I warmed them with my flame and watered them with my wine, so to speak, and I beheld already in their eyes which continually regarded me, a species of submission and of confident surrender. Both already belonged to me for anything, and I could exercise kindness or mastery over them without fail.

"Why do you wait? Are you not coming down?" asked Antonello, who, with his foot upon the step, hesitated as if before some peril.

The contracted smile still staid by him, and he made a visible effort in putting his foot to the ground, wavering like one who miscalculates distance, and his first steps were tripping and not assured.

I helped him out, and feeling the glebe yield under his feet, he paused a moment and turning towards the flowering trees, mirrored all their beauty in his bright eyes, and stood almost dazed by it.

Touching his arm, I said to him, "You do not remember these things," while Oddo, who had already entered the orchard, exclaimed with delight,

"Oh if Violante were here! This odor is worth more than all of Maria Sofia's essences."

And Antonello again repeated softly,

"We must bring them underneath these flowers."

The sound of these words from the first time uttered, seemed to fascinate his ear like a cadence, and his voice in repeating the sentence had the same inflections, while I, hearing them over again, felt an unspeakable disturbance almost as if they were directed towards me.

The desire to cut off the branches which had fallen under the weight of so much living beauty became stronger in me as I imagined confusedly the arrival of the great spring gift at the mournful palace in the twilight.

"Is there nobody in the neighborhood?" I asked impatiently.

A countryman, come upon unexpectedly, ran to me, and panting, he bent low and kissed my hands with impetuosity.

"Cut the finest branches," I said to him.

He was a magnificent example of his kind, a worthy inhabitant of that reddish land scattered with flint stones, and he appeared to me in truth, a survivor of that ancient stone race of Deucalion. He brandished the pruning-hook, and with clean rapid blows set himself to mutilating the happy vegetable

creatures. The less tenacious petals falling at every stroke whitened the ground.

"Look," said I to Antonello, accosting him with a branch, "have you ever known a thing fresher and more delicate than this?"

He lifted his weak feminine hand and touched a corolla with his finger tips. His gesture was that of a sick man or a convalescent who touches a living thing with the vague illusion that some little part of its vitality may be left to him in the contact, like the frail powder that the butterflies leave from their wings. Then he turned to his brother with an almost tender melancholy in his distressed smile,

"Do you see, Oddo?" said he, "we had forgotten, we no longer knew."

"But do you not live in a garden?" I asked, wondering at their stupor and their commotion before a simple almond branch as if it were an unheard of novelty, "do you not pass every day among leaves and flowers?"

"Yes, it is true," responded Antonello, "but I no longer see them, and then, I do not know, these are or seem to be, another thing. I cannot tell you the impression they make upon me, you would not understand."

As the whir of the pruning-hook still resounded, he turned towards the almond that dropped beneath

the blows. The man of the soil, using his muscular legs as pincers, pressed the trunk between them, while upon his head, dusky like a mulatto's, fell the fresh, silvery cloud that trembled under the sparkling of the crooked steel.

"Tell him to stop," begged Antonello of me, "we cannot carry so many branches."

"I will send the carriage with you to Trigento to carry the load," I answered, prolonging in my imagination the arrival of the spring offering before the gates of the park where the three sisters were waiting. Their figures came before me indistinctly, though with certain lineaments that seemed to spring forth from the remembrances of childhood and youth, and the desire to see them again, to hear once more their voices, to revive in their presence those old associations, to know their ills, to mingle with their unknown life, was increasing in me little by little and commenced to take the acuteness of inquietude.

Following my sentiments and thoughts (the carriage was already rolling backward to Rebursa), I said:

"There was a time when the park of Trigento was full of daffodils and violets."

"It is the same now," rejoined Oddo.

"There were great hedges of box-trees."

"There are still."

"I remember well the year you arrived from Monaco to remain here. Massimilla was very sick, and almost every day I accompanied my mother to Trigento."

We were immersed in the spring-time, the almond branches encumbered the carriage, and we had them over our shoulders and on our knees, but between all that odorous whiteness the pale face of Antonello looked to me more consumptive, and the melancholy of his feverish eyes, too much in contrast with the living expression of renewed youth, struck home upon my heart.

"I am sorry that you are not coming to Trigento to-day," said Oddo, with profound sorrow in his voice; "I don't like to leave you."

"That is true," added Antonello; "we have seen you only to-day after years, years of silence and forgetfulness, and now it seems that we cannot do without you."

They proffered the affectionate words with that simplicity and candor that solitary men, unused to the dissimulations of ordinary life, preserve. I felt already that they loved me, and that I loved them; that all at once the great gap of years between us was filled up, and that their fate was to be joined indissolubly to my own.

Why did my soul incline with so much grief towards those two subdued brothers, spread itself out with so much desire towards friendships and troubles unforeseen, show such impatience to pour its riches on all this poverty?

It was true then that long and hard discipline had not dried up in it the spontaneous fountains of emotion and of dreams, but had rendered them more profound and more fervid.

A mist of poesy diffused itself through me that February noon, warm with the breath of a precocious spring; the variable course of the Saurgo at the base of the rocks fashioned by fire, the dead city in the marshy stream, the summit of Corace gleaming like a helmet over a menacing forehead, the tawny glebe sown with flinty stones the awakeners of slumberous sparkles, the vines and the olives twisted by the enormous effort to produce fruit so rich from limbs so lean—every aspect of the surrounding country signified the power of thoughts nourished in secret, the tragic mystery of accomplished destinies, painful energy, tyrannical constriction, superb passion, every most severe and most rigid virtue of a solitary land and of lonely man.

Nevertheless, spring's mildest, most gentle warmth filled that austere dwelling-place; the silvery bloom of the almonds crowned the little eminences of the

rising ground like the foam of a wave, here and there in the oblique rays the declivities took on the tender, mellow appearance of spread velvet, the rocky heights became a rosy gold against a sky delicately green, and the influx of the season and the magic of the hour consequently sweetened the stern genius of the spot, veiled its fierceness with grace, tempered its violence and poured a humane enchantment into that basin first formed by igneous art at the terrible will of an ancient volcano, and then corroded by the cupidity or enriched by the liberality of some ancient stream.

"We will see each other very often," I said in answer to their kind words, "from Rebursa to Trigento the road is short, and I know that in you both I have re-found two brothers."

Both started back as a keeper on horseback galloped by discharging his carbine in the air as the signal for a volley of salutation and of joy. Rebursa rose before me with its four stone towers still strong and beautiful, showing yet intact the original impress of haughty pride, and extending its protection and dominion over a sturdy people whose obedience and fidelity were transmitted from father to son like characters of some vital substance.

But my soul was burdened with an anguish unfelt for a long time as I put my foot upon the threshold covered with myrtle and laurel, and no dear voice

calling me by name, bade me welcome. The images of my dead appeared before me at the foot of the staircase and fixed their cold eyes upon me without a gesture, without a nod, without a smile.

Later, for a long time I watched the carriage moving down the road to Trigento carrying home the two melancholy youths almost buried under the flowers, and my soul traveled swiftly to the park gates where the three sisters were waiting. Anatolia, Violante, Massimilla!—and I saw them receive with outstretched arms the fresh offering of the spring-tide; I sought to recognize their noble faces through the fragrant hedge, I endeavored to discover the forehead of her, whom *she* (ah dear, dead mother!) would have chosen perhaps for the necessary alliance.

The falling twilight heightened that strange and unforeseen agitation, the desire for love. An azure shadow filled the valley of the Saurgo, concealed the dead city and was slowly ascending up the rough, rocky, flight of steps; stars commenced to bud forth in the sky, and festival fires which blazed and multiplied and formed great crowns were kindled upon earth, while most high and alone, strangers to those signs of lower life, prominent in an unearthly atmosphere and almost fallen back to the age of fable, the pinnacles of the rocks still glittered. Suddenly they flamed out like carbuncles with an incredible light

which endured for a few instants, then they paled, became violet-colored, indistinct, confused, blotted out.

Last of all the lofty apex of the Corace remained aflame, wounding the sky like the cry of passion without hope, then with the rapidity of lightning, that also became extinguished, and entered into the common night.

"If the vigor of thy long discipline had not compensated thee in other than the ineffable pertubation to which thou wert abandoned yesterday, thou shouldst already be gladdened by so many efforts accomplished," said my demon to me the following morning, as we rode slowly towards the walled garden, "here thou art, ripe at the end. Before yesterday thou didst not know that thy soul had already arrived at so much maturity and fullness, the happy revelation came to thee from the need that thou suddenly feltst to pour out thy riches, to scatter them, to squander them without measure: thou feelest thyself to be inexhaustible, capable of nourishing a thousand existences, and this is indeed the prize of thy assiduous efforts now thou possessest the impetuous fruitfulness of thoroughly worked ground.

"Consequently enjoy thy springtime, be open to the influence of every breath, allow thyself to be

penetrated by all germs, accept the unknown and the unexpected and as much else as events may bring to thee, abolish every prohibition, for henceforth thy first task is completed: let thy nature which thou hast rendered upright and intense, be sacred to thee, respecting the slightest movement of thought or sentiment that it alone may produce, and now that it belongs to thee alone, and thou art its master, abandon thyself to it and enjoy it without limit.

"All now is permitted to thee; even that which thou hatedst and despisedst in others, inasmuch as all becomes noble passing through the sincerity of the flame. Fear not to be compassionate, thou who art strong, and who knowest how to impose thy power and thy punishment, be neither ashamed of thy inquietude nor thy languor, thou who hast made thyself a will firm as the cold steel of a sword; repulse not the sweetness that invades thee, the illusion that envelops thee, the melancholy that attracts thee—all those new and indefinable things that to-day tempt thy amazed soul, for they are naught but the vague forms of the mist that an effervescent life develops in the depths of thy fruitful nature.

"Welcome them then without suspicion, inasmuch as they are not foreign to thee, neither will they corrupt thee, nor become less to thee, and to-morrow these sensations may perhaps appear to thee as the

first veiled announcements of a nativity that is in thy vows."

I have never since then found an hour at once so delicious and so painful: I do not know whether the flower-laden trees had in their vital power a feeling so complete as I had in mine that limpid morning, but I am certain that they lacked that vast and confused anxiety in which innumerable thoughts and affections were agitated, and to prolong the pain and the delight I walked my horse, delaying myself upon the road, almost as if that hour would close forever a phase of my inmost life, and upon my arrival at the destined spot a new and unforeseen aspect would open before me, the dark presentiment of which was already sheltered in the depths of my uncalmed anxiety.

At intervals the breath of springtime besieging me suddenly with its whispering and its gentle warmth, transported me to the ether of dreams and abolished in me for some instants the conscionsness of the real person, infusing in me the virgin and ardent soul of one of those hero-lovers who in legends are always riding towards Sleeping Beauties in the Woods.

Did I not also ride towards the marriageable princesses, the prisoners in the closed garden, and did not each one of them in her secret heart perhaps await a lover?

Already they appeared to me in the guise desire invented for them, and already the triple image desire awakened was a first perplexity. "Which will be chosen?" I kept asking myself, feeling at the same time the nuptial gayety of one and the sepulchral sadness of the others, the germs of future inquietude stirring already within me as beneath hope I foresaw sorrow.

And anew that fear disturbed me which had before interrupted me in the midst of my unconstrained labors, the fear of blind and fatal forces against which any will, no matter how firm or inflexible would dash itself to pieces, that fear of the lightning whirlwind that in an instant can envelop the most tenacious, venturesome man, and drag him completely away from his prefixed limits.

I stopped the horse, the road at that point was deserted, the groom followed at a distance, and an intense silence, broken at intervals by the whisper of the wind in the olive orchards, reigned over the imposing solitude. A steadfast light illuminated all equally, and in the glare and the silence, all objects from the slender leaves to the gigantic rocks, appeared designed with a brightness of outline almost hard.

The ambiguity within me became more pronounced than before as I thought "Until yesterday I, too, had obtained in my spirit the same

morning clearness that all the lines of this country reveal to my attentive eyes, and now does not the new uncertainty conceal some peril? Perhaps in the solitude too great an abundance of poetry had accumulated within me and must be spread out without measure, but if I abandon myself to the impetuous torrent, where shall I be dragged? Will watchfulness be of use against a strange life? would it be better for me not to enter into the circle that suddenly, like a work of magic, had opened to enclose me?"

And the demon repeated to me with a clear voice:

"Have no fear! Welcome the unknown and the unforeseen, and whatever else events may bring to thee; abolish every prohibition, proceed securely and freely, and have no care except to live. Thy destiny cannot be accomplished except in the lavishness of life!"

Almost with vehemence I urged my horse to a trot, as if at that point a great act had been decided, and soon Trigento with its stone houses, children of the protecting rocks, appeared on the declivity of the hill.

At the summit appeared the ancient palace with its walled garden, which on the opposite declivity descended to the plain, and gave the idea of a vast cloister full of things forgotten or extinct.

As I touched foot to the ground before the gate I heard Oddo, who was watching for me like a sentinel, cry:

"Welcome, Claudio!"

He ran merrily towards me, as he did the first time, with outstretched arms.

"I thought you would have been here sooner," he said in a tone of reproof. "I have waited for you here two hours."

"I delayed upon the way," I answered; "I wished to recognize the trees and the stones."

With one of his sudden acts, half of curiosity and half of fear, he approached my horse and touched its neck.

"How beautiful it is," he murmured, while under his pale, graceful hand the animal's neck had a rapid vibration of sensibility.

"Mount him whenever you will," I said to him, "this or any other."

"I don't believe that I could stand it in the saddle now," he answered; "I think I should be afraid. But come, come; they are waiting for you."

And he led me up by a path between walls of box-trees enfeebled by old age and full of deep fissures like holes, from which the fresh odor of violets seemed to come out to me as strange as youthful breath in a deformed mouth.

"Yesterday evening," said Oddo, a little agitated, "yesterday evening we brought joy with your almond branches. You can't imagine how we two felt in the depths of that carriage buried under all those flowers. Antonello was like a baby. I have never seen him so."

At intervals the green walls opened in arches, disclosing to my view a grassy earth where the long narrow stripes of sunshine cleft the shade with a clean cut.

"I have never seen him so," repeated Oddo. "I have never heard him say so many foolish words."

Stone urns with large round sides alternated with crippled or headless statues, whose eloquent attitudes were clothed with lichens, and near their plinths a few jonquils were blooming.

"Then when at last we got here," he continued, "the braches were so heavy we couldn't get them up and the sisters had to come to liberate us. How gay they were! They went up loaded and we heard them laugh on the stairs. All new things for us, Claudio!"

Something like the sound of a suffocated voice reached my ear, the subdued murmur of a fountain hidden in the vicinity, and an indefinable anxiety all at once filled my heart.

"All the evening we talked of you, and remembered

so many things from long ago, to say nothing of a few dreams for the future. Who would ever have imagined your return? But even then none of us thought you would remain at all; it seemed to us that after several days you would flee away from here; it is not easy to endure this life of ours. Massimilla, you see, prefers the cloister. Do you know that Massimilla is about to leave us?"

As I ascended close to the vegetal wall a strong odor of bitterness reached my nostrils from the small new leaves of the box-trees that glittered like beryls among the opaque verdure.

"Ah, here is Violante!" exclaimed Oddo, touching my arm.

The unexpected appearance made my heart palpitate and the color rushed to my face.

She was under a high arch of box-trees, with her feet in the grass, and behind her, through an opening, an outskirt of meadow vanished in golden lines. She smiled upon us without advancing, waiting until we came near her, and it seemed to my astonished gaze that she offered all of her beauty in that calm attitude, upon that green threshold where perhaps her fingers had gathered the numerous violets that adorned her belt.

Stretching out her hand to me, and looking in my face, she said with a voice that was the perfect

musical expression of the form of the mouth from which it issued:

"Be welcome! We have expected you from yesterday. Oddo and Antonello brought us instead your gift which was none the less acceptable."

"After many years I have re-entered your domains," I replied to them both. "I remember well the first time that I came here with my mother, and I feel already a sorrow that I have stayed away so long. Setting out from Rome I thought to find an empty house at Rebursa, but I did not know that Trigento would have compensated me so greatly. I owe you very much gratitude."

"It is we who owe you gratitude," she interrupted, "if our company prove not too grave for you. You know that this is a place without joy."

"Still sadness has its good for him who knows how to find it. Is it not true?"

"Perhaps."

"And in truth since I have passed these gates I have had none other but exquisite sensations. This great garden is delicious; how can you not feel the poetry of its old age? Yesterday when I saw Oddo and Antonello full of wonder before those almonds as if they had never seen a flowering tree I thought that here all must be arid and dead, and instead I find a spring-time sweeter than that

which I have left outside. Are you not tired perhaps of gathering violets in the grass, you have your belt full?"

She laughed, lowering her eyes to her waist as she touched with bare fingers the blossoms that ornamented her.

"You come from the city," she said with her sonorous veiled voice, whose richness of *timbre* was somewhat thin as if from a slender flaw; "you come from the city, and the country gives you her first fruits."

"Oh, I don't know, certain things ought always to seem new."

"There are certain things that we see no longer, and love no longer," said Oddo with melancholy. "Perhaps Violante doesn't even sense the odor of the flowers she gathers."

"Is it true?" I asked, turning towards her, my eyes meeting her marble-like profile, impassible under the voluminous head of hair as one of the immortal statues.

"What?" she asked with the air of one returning from an absence, and not having heard her brother's words:

"Oddo says you do not smell the flowers you have gathered; is it so?"

A tender red colored her cheeks.

"Oh, no!" she replied with a vivacity that resisted the slow rhythms to which her life seemed reduced. "Don't believe Oddo, he says so because I love strong perfumes; but I smell the faintest also, even that of the stones."

"Of the stones?" repeated Oddo, laughing.

"What do you know about it, Oddo? Be quiet!"

We were upon the great stone stairs, arbor-covered, ascending gradually towards the palace, with her between us, and as the gradations were very broad, she made a step upon every one and stopped an instant before raising her foot to the successive stair. As it was always the same foot the frequency of the act fatigued her somewhat, and the weight of the body in a certain degree fell upon the curve of the knee at the relaxing of the haughty will that until then had held her figure erect like a perfect stem.

A sudden softness wavered through the superb form, a new rhythm revealed the almost obedient graces of it, the pliable virtues of love, and so strong was the power emanated from that beautiful creature that I did not know how to distract my eyes from her motions, and I drew backward holding myself behind them that I might surround her entirely with my glance.

She seemed to drive my spirit back towards that marvelous epoch in which handicraftsmen extracted

from dormant matter the perfect forms that men considered to be the sole truths worthy of adoration upon earth.

And regarding her, ascending behind her in her footsteps, I thought:

"It is right that she should remain intact, it would be only a god who could possess her without shame."

Her sovereign head passed by in the light like a native element, and I felt that her beauty was yet to reach the perfection of maturity, the brief hour of supreme worth, and I thanked fortune for having granted me such a spectacle.

"Ah," I said to myself, "I will adore her, but would not dare to love her; I would not dare to look into her soul to surprise its secret.

"Yet every movement reveals that she is made for love, but for the love that is sterile, for the voluptuousness that does not create. Her entrails will never support the deforming weight, the milk's wave will never strain the pure outline of her breast."

She stopped impatiently, a little panting with the effort, and said:

"How tiresome these stairs are! Let us rest a moment, if you don't mind."

"Antonello and Anatolia are coming down," exclaimed Oddo, perceiving the two coming through

the intricacy of the arbor on the upper steps, "we will wait for them."

She who had been represented to me as the force-giver, the beneficent and powerful virgin, the rich and prodigal soul, came towards us. She already seemed a support, as Antonello held his arm under hers, measuring his uncertain pace with the cadence of those sure footsteps.

"Of which of us," asked Violante suddenly, but with a light accent that relieved the question of any indiscreet sense, "of which of us had you the least confused remembrance?"

I hesitated an instant, and then I answered uncertainly, while my ears listened to the rustle of Anatolia's dress:

"I couldn't tell you; I do not know, but without doubt the figures of my remembrance have almost nothing in common with the present reality. From the day I left here a period of life developed for us in which transformations are most rapid and most profound."

The other two had already reached us, and Anatolia extending her hand, said also to me:

"Be welcome!"

Her gesture had a firm frankness, and in the contact her grasp seemed to communicate a sense of almost gusenero force and efficacious goodness, and

suddenly to infuse in my spirit a species of fraternal confidence.

It was a hand despoiled of rings, neither too white nor too long, but robust in its pure form, capable of gathering and sustaining, pliant and firm at the same time, an imprint of agility, upon the back which was varied by reliefs of joints and a woof of veins, while the hollow, tepid palm that seemed the radiant hearth of sensibility was full of wrinkles of sweetness.

"Be welcome!" said the warm, cordial voice. "You bring us the sun and the springtime from Rome."

"Oh, no," I interrupted. "I found here the one and the other. I left the fog and many other gray things at Rome, and I have expressed before the sorrow I feel for having remained away from here too long."

"You should compensate us, then, for your forgetfulness," said Antonello with his strange smile.

"How do you find Trigento?" questioned Anatolia; "changed in almost nothing, is it not true? You used to come here with your mother. You remember it well, don't you? We have never been able to forget it; we never could; and you will find here, among the things that remain intact, the memory of that holy soul and of her immense goodness."

A grave silence followed those words which summoned forth so many thoughts, and for an instant the remembrance of the dead, deep in my filial heart, gave an aspect of non-existence also to beings and things present.

For some seconds everything seemed not less far off and distant than the sky that I saw paling through the arbor's naked vines like a worn-out net, but as the brief allusion faded out, I felt myself nearer to her who had produced it, and I felt myself incapable of wasting more useless words, feeling the need of penetrating into the truth of that sadness.

"And Donna Aldoina?" I inquired in a low voice as I turned towards Anatolia, communicating now with her alone.

Was she not indeed the actual keeper of that gloomy habitation? Evoking the dead, had not she herself resuscitated the image of the maniac?

"She has remained the same always," she responded, likewise low-toned. "It is better for you not to see her, at least not to-day. It would cause you too much pain, and for us—imagine it! It is the torture of all of our days; a torture that endures for years without intermission, destroying the very soul."

Her eyes with a movement of the lids cast a furtive glance at Antonello, in which I could read the

secret terror which the poor fellow in danger upon the abyss's brink inspired in her.

"We have never had the courage to separate her from us; to send her away," she continued, "because she is not violent, but mild instead, and sometimes she seems cured; gives us almost the illusion of a miracle; she calls us by name, remembers some small fact far back, has a calm smile, and, although we know now that it is a mistake, yet every time hope palpitates in us and the anxiety is suffocating. You understand—"

Her voice in its sorrow lost sound like a relaxed cord. She went on.

"It is not possible to confine her in her rooms, to keep her closed up; neither have we the heart to flee when she shows herself, when she comes to meet us, to talk to us; so, almost continually, she lives at our side, mixes with our existence."

"Some days," interrupted Antonello, almost with impetuosity, as if urged by a subdued excitement, "some days the whole house is full of her; we breathe in her madness. Some one of us remains hours and hours to hear her speak, seated in front of her, with hands imprisoned in those trembling hands. Do you understand?" And another silence, graver yet, fell upon us all, for each suffered, recognizing in himself the reality of the sorrow.

The delicate blue shadows of the arbor, where the sun's gold mingled tenderly, enwrapped us like the veil of a dream, in the silence the sound of a light step approaching on the terraced steps beneath us could be heard, and at equal intervals a dull rushing like an overflowing basin. A mysterious vibration seemed to come up from the solitary garden, and I understood how with all those appearances a sad, weak soul could compose the ghost of an unnatural life, and, feeding it upon himself, remain oppressed.

Thus, all at once, the torture to which Destiny had condemned these last survivors of a fallen race, was revealed to me in all its cruelty, and the figure evoked by the words of the certain victim appeared to me tragic and colossal. I saw in my imagination the old demented princess, seated in the shadows of a distant room, and one of her sons bending towards her his hands imprisoned within the maternal hands. The act of the mournful enchantress seemed to be fatal and inexorable, and it was as if she unconsciously attracted into her madness all the creatures of her blood, one after the other, and that no one could draw away from the blind, cruel will. Like a familiar Erinnys, she presided over the dissolution of her progeny.

Then through the arid entanglement of vines I

looked towards the silent palace whose dark profundity had up to that day enclosed so much desperate anguish, and had concealed so many useless tears—tears extracted from pure and ardent eyes worthy of reflecting the most superb scenes in the world, and of pouring joy into the souls of poets and rulers.

"Beauty's Eyes!" I thought, letting my gaze revert again to Violante, "what earthly misery can veil the splendor of truth that burns in you? What afflicted soul can be unmindful of the consoling virtue that flows from you?"

My suffering suddenly disappeared as if under the influence of a soothing balm, the turpid images faded away like a sad vapor, as I gazed upon the motionless Violante.

She was seated upon a plinth of stone that had perhaps once sustained an urn, her elbow rested upon her knee and with the palm of her hand she upheld her chin, and in that simple attitude her entire figure offered that succession of mute cadences in which abides the secret of supreme art; once again it seemed to me that she was both present and yet far away. Upon her low forehead the reflection of that ideal crown that she wore upon the summit of her thoughts was visible, and this wonderfully dense hair twisted in a great knot upon the nape of the neck

appeared in its undulations to have obeyed the rhythm that regulates the repose of the sea.

"Massimilla," said Oddo, announcing the third sister.

I turned and beheld her close to us, ascending with her light step the last bit of stairway, and bearing upon her countenance and in all of her person the vestiges of the dream in which she had been immersed, the intimate poesy of the past hour, with the faithful companionship of a book in the solitude of a recess known to her alone.

"Where have you been?" called Oddo, just before she reached us.

She smiled timidly, and a slight flame tinted the outlines of her cheeks.

"Down there," she answered, "reading."

Her voice between the small lips was liquid and argentine, and her book held peeping from its pages a blade of grass as marker.

I bowed and she extended her hand, still continuing her half frightened smile, and something of the same tender compassion that in her far-off days I had felt towards the little sick girl my mother visited, awakened in the depths of my soul. Her hand was so graceful and slender that it reminded me of one of those delicate lilies called hemerocallis which bloom only for a day in the hot gravel.

As she did not speak to me, I found myself at a loss for words delicate enough for her timid grace.

"Shall we go up?" asked Anatolia, turning to me, her clear voice breaking the sort of languid spell that in the warmth of the arbor our inexpressible thoughts and melancholy had formed, "our father is very desirous to see you."

"And again we all ascended the terraced steps upward to the palace, the three sisters, each somewhat ahead of the other, preceding us—first Anatolia, last Massimilla, proffering some remarks at intervals when the silence of everything seemed to demand the sound of their voices, and they believed to dissipate the sadness of that silence from the head of their guest. Those brief sonorous tone-waves, issuing from lips ahead of me that I did not see, died out assailing me, and astonished and perplexed, surrounded by the virgin forest, I ascended in their midst like one in the presence of witchery.

However, if I heard the three rhythms but alternately, they were so simultaneous and continuous to my sight, that from time to time my spirit extended curious to distinguish them, or made itself concave to blend them in a profound harmony, and like those digressions which in a fugue fill up the silence of the aspects of passing things and the par-

ticularities of the figures, entered and enriched my musical sentiment without disconcerting it.

The signs of abandon and neglect were spread here and there up the ancient stairway which was still encumbered with the spoils of the last autumn: A reclining nymph in slumber was forced to hold her head bent in an attitude of pain, as the support of the arm to her moss-spotted brow was lacking; in a vase of reddish clay, long as a sarcophagus, and thickly overrun with hard, wild herbs, a solitary little daffodil flowered weak and tremulous among the hostile invasion, and in a ruin of the parapet, where the ivy's penetrating roots had caused a division, an internal canal, similar to a broken artery, was uncovered, and there might be perceived the sparkle and might be heard the murmur of the water descending to nourish the heart of the weeping fountains.

The signs of abandon and of forgetfulness were scattered all along our ascension, the statue, the flower and the water all told me the same truth, and Violante and Massimilla and Anatolia were transfigured in my mind by virtue of mysterious analogies.

"Oh beautiful souls," I whispered to myself, measuring the visible rhythms of their existence, "is not the perfection of human love perhaps in your trinity? You are the triple form that disguises my

desire in the hour of grand harmony, in you all the most stately needs of my flesh and of my spirit could be gratified, and for the work that I am to complete you could become the marvelous instruments of my will and of my destinies. Are you not those whom I would have created to ornament with a sublime beauty and sorrow the occult world of which I am the indefatigable artificer? To-day I know of you but mere semblances and fugitive words, but I feel that to-morrow each one of you will correspond in her entire being to the likeness that breathes and palpitates within me."

Thus the three sisters, each obeying the secret music that was conducting her life towards the unknown end, ascended with my asperations and my prayers.

And their figures threw great shadows on the stones.

When I paused, with my foot upon the threshold, the image of the insane woman reappeared to me so full of life and cruelty that I had a secret shivering at it. The whole place was as if under her sinister domination, saddened and terrified by her omnipresence, and I seemed to read in the countenances of her children my own uneasiness.

I thought to have found her at the head of the staircase awaiting us.

Guessing my thought, Anatolia said to me softly and reassuringly:

"I would not have you fear, you will not see her; I have arranged so that in these hours at least you will not meet her. Try not to think of it, so that our hospitality may not seem too sad to you."

Antonello glanced up at the window panes of the open galleries surrounding the courtyard, watching with those unquiet eyes of his, over which the eyelashes continually palpitated.

"Do you see the grass?" exclaimed Oddo, pointing out the verdure that grew along the walls in the interstices of the slabs.

"A sign and augury of peace," said I, striving to cast off oppression and alleviate my downheartedness. "I am sorry that I found none yesterday in my own courtyard; they had cut it, but I would have preferred it to the solemn leaves of the myrtle and the laurel. Great houses should always have plenty of grass growing around them; it is one sign of life the more."

The courtyard was as sonorous as a nave, and the echoes were ready to gather up even the lowest spoken words, and noticing the mute fountain I thought of the mysterious music to which the water might have invited those waiting reverberations.

"Why is the fountain silent?" I asked, wishing to

seize every occasion to maintain the cause of life in that abode full of forgotten and extinct things. "Not long since I heard the water running on the terrace steps."

"Address yourself to Antonello," said Violante; "it is he who has imposed silence."

Her brother's face colored quickly, and his eyes grew ill-humored and moody, like one who was about to give way to an impetus of wrath. Violante's harmless denunciation seemed to give him shame and sorrow, or to reopen a dispute already amicably adjusted. He restrained himself, however; but when he spoke his tone was altered.

"Imagine, Claudio, my rooms are right there," said he, indicating a place in the gallery, "and from there one may hear this fountain crashing like a cascade. Think of it! a noise that almost destroys the senses! You would not believe it possible, but do you not hear now what a booming the voice has here, even in the daytime?"

His whole long, emaciated body vibrated with the aversion to the noise, the nervous horror, the unconquerable abhorrence of which he had already given signs the day before at the carbine shots and the cries of the men.

"But I wish you could hear it at night time," he continued excitedly. "I wish you could hear it; the

water is no longer water, it becomes a lost soul who shrieks, who laughs, who sobs, who stammers, who mocks, who mourns, who calls, who commands! It is incredible! Sometimes, listening to it in sleeplessness, I have forgotten that it was water, and have been able to remember it no longer. Do you understand me? Do you know what I mean?"

He stopped suddenly with a manifest effort to control himself, and looked bewilderedly at Anatolia, whose face contracted with grief. The pain in her countenance disappeared under his glance, drew itself further within her, became hidden, and to dissipate the sense of evil that seemed to hold us all, she said, with an almost gay air:

"Really, Antonello is not exaggerating. Shall we evoke the lost soul? It is easy."

We were all there, close to the dry fountain upon whose inert age the sudden pause, the words and aspect of Antonello, the solemnity of the enclosed spot, the silvery coldness of the light that reigned down from on high, and the impending metamorphosis, seemed to confer almost the mystery of a work of magic.

The marble mass, pompously composed in order of Neptune's horses, tritons, dolphins, and shells, rose before us covered with grayish crust and dried lichens, whitening here and there like the trunk of a

gatter-tree, and in their silence the many human and bestial mouths seemed to have preserved the attitude of the liquid voice last produced from them.

"Move," commanded Anatolia, bending towards a bronze disk that closed a circular aperture in the pavement near the margin of the lower basin, "I give thee life!"

And putting her finger in the ring that stood out from the disk's centre, she tried to move the weight, but not succeeding, rose up again, her face vermilion from the effort. I went to her aid, and opened it, and again her finger sought the hidden connection, while, as with one accord, we both drew back, the muttering of the water might already be heard running through the veins of the lifeless fountain.

It was an instant of anxious expectation, that waiting for the monster's mouths to give forth a response; involuntarily I imagined the voluptuousness of the stone invaded by the fresh, fluid life, and invented to myself its impossible shiver.

The Tritons' trumpets blew, the throats of the dolphins gurgled, and from the apex a jet of water rushed forth hissing, as sparkling and rapid as a rapier thrust brandished against the azure, splintering itself, drawing back, hesitating, rising upward straighter, and stronger, maintaining itself high in the air, becoming adamantine, stem-like, seeming to bloom.

A short, clear sound like the cracking of a whip first echoed through the enclosure, then it changed to an outbreak of powerful laughter, a burst of applause, a downfall of rain. All the mouths gave out their jets of water that curved over, arch-like, to fill the basins underneath. The stone, wet here and there, was covered with dark marks, and glittered in the polished parts, while the rivulets that lined it became ever thicker. Every part of it apparently enjoyed the contact with the water and opened all of its pores to the innumerable drops, as it revived like a tree benefitted by a cloud. The narrowest cavities filled, overflowed, and composed silvery crowns which were continually destroyed and continually renewed, the instantaneous play multiplying downward through the diversity of the sculpture, while the uninterrupted sounds in the great echo of the walls, formed a music ever more profound.

Most sturdy in the voluble symphony of water falling into water, ruled the crashing and splintering of the central water-jet that, from instant to instant, dashed the miraculous flowers blooming from the tip of its stem against the Tritons' necks.

"Do you hear it?" cried Antonello, who regarded that triumph with the eyes of an enemy. "Does such an uproar seem long tolerable to you?"

"Ah, I would stay hours and days to listen to

it," I seemed to hear Violante say with a graver inflection in her voice, "no other music to me is worth this!"

She remained so close to the fountain that the sprinkling from the water-jets fell upon her person, and a fine sparkling dust spread upon her hair. The power of her beauty once again excluded whatever strange thought or discordant image my spirit might contain, and yet, again, she appeared to me isolated and intangible, outside of common life, resembling rather a fiction of art than a creature of our species; everything around her recognized the sovereignty of her presence, appealing and deferring to her beauty, and harmonizing with it.

Like the great green arch which had curved over her when she first appeared to my sight, and like the antique plinth that had sustained her weight, so too did that sonorous vase open to the sky seem created for her alone, and to respond perfectly to the ideal harmony that her simple attitude carried out.

Since by means of such a human form, nature had manifested her conception of highest perfection, it seemed to me that every other idea enclosed in natural covering ought necessarily to serve as a sign to lead the contemplator's spirit to understand this con-

ion, most high and unique.

ience it happened, that regarding the maiden at

the fountain, I discovered and stored up a pure truth: "When Beauty shows itself, all the essences of life converge in it as in a centre, and it has therefore as tributary the entire universe."

"One of our troubles," said Oddo to me, as we ascended the broad balustered staircase, upon whose silence the flourishes and the clouds of the seventeenth century allegories simulated the fury of a whirlwind, "one thing that troubles us is this space, it gives us a sort of continual confusion, and almost a sense of humiliating littleness."

The edifice was, in fact, too ample and too empty. Restored in the seventeenth century and from a feudal castle transformed into a pleasure villa, it still preserved the formidable enormity of its walls and vaulted ceilings upon which successive epochs had left various imprints of art and luxury, sometimes in contrast and sometimes oppressive.

The great number of mirrors which covered the entire length of walls multiplied the space to the infinite, and nothing could have been more gloomy than those wan illusory abysses seeming to expand into a supernatural world, and to promise from instant to instant funeral apparitions to the gaze of the living.

"Claudio, my son!" exclaimed Prince Luzio, with

emotion in his voice, coming to meet me as soon as he perceived me, "dear, dear son!"

I felt his aged, exhausted body tremble as he embraced me, and kissed me paternally upon the forehead, and holding his hand upon my shoulder he gazed for some moments fixedly in my face as if in a dream, while through the ashy blue of his weakened eyes passed a wave of memory, anguish and regret.

"How you remind me of your father," he continued, with a voice ever more affectionate as he communicated his emotion to me; "it is a wonderful resemblance! I seem to see again Massenzio in his youth when we were comrades in the Light Cavalry of the Guard. I can see him alive again; how much you are like him, my son!"

He took me by the hand and led me towards the window, as if he wished to withdraw himself with me and entice me into the evocation of those distant memories.

"How much you do resemble him!" he repeated when he perceived my countenance in the clear light. "Oh, if the blessed soul still lived! He ought not to have died; my God! he should not have died!"

He shook his head in sorrow towards the phantom of that beautiful life cut down too soon, and such was the sincerity of his affection that it penetrated to my utmost soul, and I could no longer feel myself

a stranger in that house where I found the memory of my dead preserved so purely.

"Look!" said the prince, drawing the extreme threads of his whitened beard through his fingers, and smiling a smile in which I discovered something of Anatolia's noble sweetness, "see how old I have grown!"

All of his person showed a painful despondency, but the splendor of premature white hairs conferred a venerable majesty upon his head, and in his forehead he still bore vividly the hereditary sign of his dominating race, but his hands, almost by miracle, had suffered no injury from sickness or old age, neither did they show any senile deformation whatever.

They had remained pure and beautiful as if rendered unalterable by some balm, those lavish, prodigal hands with which the munificent lord had dissipated riches upon the exile's path, to maintain still longer in the eyes of his King a reflection of fallen royalty, and almost as if to the memory of wasted treasures, a cameo glittered upon the prince's ring-finger.

The slow gestures of those hands, while the torpid blood revived in the warmth of remembrance, seemed to draw something of an extinct world from a zone of shadow, and the thought rendered their impression

upon me the more singular. When the gentle old man, being seated, rested his arms upon the supports of the chair, they took on the semblance of relics to me, and I regarded them with an unknown sentiment of almost superstitious respect, so much so that in that hour, I believed to live inexpressibly in my poesy, instead of in the reality of acts.

As my glance rested fixedly upon the imaged gem, the prince smiled, saying,

"It is the picture of Violante," and taking off the ring he handed it to me.

The delicate work was of oldtime manufacture, not unworthy of Pirgotele or Dioscoride, and the divine lineaments raised upon the bloody field of the sardonyx, corresponded to the superb creature, with such perfection that I thought silently,

"Truly then, she illumined the art of by-gone centuries, and from immemorial time conferred upon durable matter the privilege of perpetuating the idea that she to-day incarnates!"

"The mother when she was pregnant with her, wore this ring," added the prince with the same sweet smile, "and I guard it always!"

By such means the harmony of things put my ...ery minute into an ideal state that approached ...n of dreams and foreknowledge, yet with-

out attaining to it, proffering a melodious subject to my sensibility and my imagination, and in myself I assisted at the continual genesis of a superior life in which all appearances were transfigured as if by the virtue of a magic mirror.

The three chosen creatures illumined and darkened this life alternately, and the shadows and lights had in them the significations of a language that I already interpreted with extraordinary lucidity, as if it had been familiar to me for a long time.

I remained therefore dazzled not only by the reflections of the rock, but also by the confused lightnings of my smitten thought, when Violante, nearing an open window, showed me with a gesture a spectacle that she looked to have been able to create, and said to me,

"See there!"

It was a window looking northward, in the part of the palace opposite to the garden, and opened wide upon an abyss. As I advanced a sort of impetuous vibration penetrated through all my being, exalting it unexpectedly to the sentiment of a mute and terrible grandeur.

"Is this perhaps your secret," I asked the revealer, but without words, so much did the silence at her side seem to me to be full of speech.

The precipice descended almost perpendicularly

under the massive props with which the northern wall was furnished, sinking downward to the whitish, rugged bed of a river that even in its dryness still menaced with the ruinous wrath of a torrent.

With the same atrocious and desperate violence with which lava streams, descending to the Sicilian sea, bound, raise up and twist themselves, black and red, creaking, roaring, hissing at the first contact with the water, so did the rock raise itself from the lowlands of the river and struggle against the sky, opposing to the wall constructed by men a gigantic mass wrought by a dumb fury.

The roughest, the rudest contractions of bodies possessed by demoniacal energies or by destructive spasms appeared transfixed in that horrid structure, like the precipice, where the new martyrs were indicated to Dante, before reaching the river of blood guarded by the Centaurs, and in it also every kind of material, flexible and fluid, seemed invented to contrast with the hard stone—curls of rebellious heads of hair, throngs of fighting serpents, intricacies of uprooted growths, twistings of entrails, bunches of muscles, circlings of whirlpools, folds of membranes, coils of ropes.

The spectre of a frantic turbulence arose from
ct immobility from which the noontide
shadow, and the palpitation of a

vehement fever seemed compressed by that inert crust.

"Is this your secret?" I repeated again without words to the revealer, for inward impetuosity did not yet permit me to choose and control the sounds of my voice.

She at my side was also silent, and I looked neither at her nor did she look at me; but standing, bent towards the multiform rock, we were drawn one to the other by that fascination that gives common enjoyment to those who read together in the same book, for we were reading together in a book at once charming and perilous.

Raising her head she said, with a slight motion:

"Do you hear the hawks?"

And we both searched the peaks with dazzled eyes.

"Do you hear?" she repeated.

The rock assailed the sky with a crest shaggy with points, and stained reddish-color, like rust or blood-clots, while the cries of the rapacious birds heightened the fury of its cruelty.

Then a sudden dizziness seized me that was like the horror of a too vast longing and pride. Perhaps in the roots themselves of my being the barbaric intoxication of far-off ancestors awoke in me, since the indefinable perturbation was translated by a lightning-like succession of flashing images, where I saw men

who resembled me rush into sacked cities, spring over the piles of corpses and heaps of rubbish, and sinking their swords with indefatigable motion into human flesh, bear away on their saddle, through innumerable tongues of fire, half-nude women captives, while up to the paunches of their horses, which were agile and cruel as leopards, the blood reached.

"Ah, I would have known how to possess you in the midst of a massacre, in a nuptial bed of fire, or under the wing of death!" whispered in silence the ancient soul within me to her who stood near. "My will would have bent my body to miracles; I would have mounted upon the smooth stones of these walls under the fire of a thousand cross-bows, and yet I would have carried you away alive?"

Filled with the magnificent and tremendous desolation that ennobled the sky, and violently irradiated the maiden's countenance with its reflection, my eyes met her face and had an almost painful joy from its illumination, and I experienced a mad desire to strain that head between my hands, to press it backward, to bring it ever nearer to my breath, to scrutinize it ever closer, to imprint every line of it upon my thoughts—not unlike him who may have recovered from the sterile ground the sublime fragment by which the world will have again the glory of an idea that seemed extinct.

She was like the statue placed in full view of the Oriental sun, her perfection did not fear the light. I saw in her bodily form the impress of the eternal type, and at the same instant recognized that the frailness of her flesh was not exempt from the common human fate. She was like a delicious fruit that nears the point of its maturity, beyond which is corruption. The flesh of her face had the ineffable transparency of petals that to-morrow will be faded.

"Who will draw you from beneath the sacrilege of dissolving Time? Who will stop you with a deadly javelin on the summit of your perfection when you indicate its miserable decline?"

These thoughts came to me at the same time that her brother's dark words arose in my memory, "Violante is killing herself with perfumes."

And in silence I praised her thus with the religious need of celebrating her every act.

"Oh sovereign creature! Being perfect you feel the necessity of death; you feel that death alone can preserve you from every vile injury, and since all in you is noble, you meditate offering to the solemn custodian a body regally impregnated with perfumes."

After those draughts of perfumed wine, what savor could the board at which we sat have for us?

Surrounding objects, vague and full of changeful

color, composed an indescribable subdued harmony, where little by little the passion communicated to my soul by the fiery rock was to be consumed.

The walls were covered with mirrors divided symmetrically by small golden columns, and in the spaces of the divisions were painted festoons and clusters of roses in alternate order, and the mirrors were dimmed and greenish like the waters of lonely morasses, the tiny columns were fine and twisted as the tresses of blonde children, and the roses were languid and pious like the garlands that gird the wax martyrs in the tabernacles. But the almond branches, perhaps in homage to the guest who had donated them, were ingeniously attached to the tendrils of the chandeliers, and shed their still fresh fragrance and bloom against the ancient mirrors, reflecting and multiplying themselves in the sea-green pallor until they created the appearance of some far-off, aquatic spring-time.

All this had a tacit gentleness that mingled with the humble grace of Massimilla, as if the virgin already promised to Jesus participated in their allegory and their kind, and already showed the semblance of a creature "departed from this century," like Beatrice in the dream of the *Vita Nuova*, and
r aspect of humility she also might say,
e the beginning of peace."

She was in front of me, and as I gazed at her my imagination worked so strongly that for several instants I conceived her absent and her place empty, and all at once that emptiness seemed filled by a shadow so sombre that it looked like the mouth of an abyss in which one after the other of her near of kin would be precipitated. I thus elevated myself to a unique and tragic vision of all of those in life about me, in the extraordinary importance that the background of shadow gave to them.

Now and then those present proffered simple words or indulged in the common gestures that natural necessity required, as seated around the family board they took their food, but their acts and their accents seemed accompanied by a mystery that from time to time weighed them down with almost terrible significance, or rendered them as ludicrous as a game of automatons. A contrast cruelly evident existed between the manners of the vital function that they were fulfilling and the signs of the inevitable distinction that was being accomplished in them.

Seated at the right of Massimilla, Antonello in all of his behavior showed a kind of repressed impatience as if he were obliged to nourish with his hands, not himself but a stranger, and gazing at him I had in a flash the intuition of the horror that was suffocating him, in feeling within himself the presence of the

stranger, perhaps confused as yet but still undoubtedly there.

And my eyes falling instinctively upon Oddo, seated at Massimilla's left, surprised in his attitude something that was like the weakened reflection of the fraternal perturbation. Nothing could be more lugubrious than that occult response between two brothers born at the same parturition, and consecrated to the same fate, and nothing could be sweeter than that calm, virginal figure between their troubled brains like an image of Prayer.

The almond flowers exhaled a strange odor of honey in the tepid air, and occasionally some petal, rosier than the others, fell along the mirrors as in a silence of waters. Then I thought of the pause in the fruit-grove.

Ah, in truth, how could those miserable eyes terrified by so many phantoms see pure and beautiful things? What was I myself doing in that place if not in commemoration of the dead? Everything was dim like the walls, and seemed to recede into a far-off past, assuming an antiquated and discolored aspect as if covered with dust, while the two slow, negligent servants, with their blue liveries and long white stockings, had also the air of having come out of a wardrobe of the past century, sad relics of an abolished luxury.

When they retired or drew aside they seemed to fade away like shadows in the illusory distance of the mirrors, and to re-enter into their inanimate world.

But the voice of the prince, assiduous awakener of memories, broke the spell. All hushed with respect when he spoke, and one heard only his deep, senile voice that at times became hoarse with suffocated wrath, or trembled with anguish and sorrow.

It was an unhappy day for the old gentleman, being the anniversary of the departure of the King from Gaeta, and that day completed the twenty-first year of exile.

"Well," he said, turning to me, as he became warm in his belief, and his beautiful white beard gave him a prophetic appearance, "well, Claudio, when a King falls as Francisco of Bourbon fell at Gaeta, like a martyr and a hero, it is not possible that God will not raise him and restore him to his kingdom. Listen to my words, son of Massenzio Cantelmo, and do not forget them. The King of the Two Sicilies will finish his days in glory upon his legitimate throne, and my only prayer is that God may permit this to be accomplished before my eyes are closed!"

To the pallid phantom of royalty he composed on the ruins of the strong city, a deification of flames and of blood.

"Admirable faith!" I thought, perceiving the sparks which still could kindle in the ash-blue of those dim eyes, "admirable faith and vain! The virtue of the Bourbons sleeps at San Dionigi," and as the prince's words brought up the glittering image of the Bavarian heroine, the contempt in me surged more fiercely against that king of twenty-three years to whom Fortune had presented the horse that bore Henry of Navarre to Paris, while the dastard, like incompetent Philip V., desired to mount only those horses figured upon the tapestries that decorated his rooms.

"What a magnificent undertaking this Bourbon had before him, when he issued from the palace at Caserta, where the doctors were waiting to embalm his father's corpse which was covered with a thousand putrid sores!" thought I in the quickness of fancy that the war images evoked by the venerable old man had stimulated. "He lacked nothing, not even the spectacle and the odor of putrefaction which should have been most potent in exciting grandest thoughts. In truth he had everything: the imperious force of an ancient name, the youth that seduces and seems to last forever, a kingdom inured to tyranny, on the three most beautiful seas, an opulent royal residence in view of a curved gulf sonorous as a harp, a passionate companion whose slender nostrils

respired a heroic dream and palpitated with a voluptuousness that forbode the electric exhalation of hurricanes.

He had all these riches to enjoy and defend, and, a spouse just returned from the extreme shore of another sea, he carried still in his ear the clamor of faithful peoples, as he listened to yet another clamor, and the occasion of a superb struggle offered itself to him there at the confines of his dominion, upon fields already watered with blood, and smoky with a violent fermentation, fields open to the strongest thought, the noblest word, the swiftest sword.

In truth, he had everything, except the lion's nature.

Why, then, had Fortune bestowed the accumulation of so much favor upon a weak lamb? More timid blood had never flowed in youthful veins, and never was sensuality more inactive.

The beauty itself of legitimate dominion, the divine form of the shores, the voluptuous breeze, the mystery of the nights, all the spells of dying summer should have moved at least the senses of that youth, irritated in him the profound instinct of submission, and communicated to him a wild shock of life.

Ah, the last night spent in that almost deserted royal residence, abandoned by the courtiers, swept by great sea-breezes that brought in the perfumes of

September and the supreme sweetness of the gulf, while the besieged curtains murmured, diffusing vague fears, and the lights flickered and went out on tables covered with sad notices with which the servants believed to be the most faithful, had taken leave in that hour of agony!

And the desolation of that departure in the twilight, on a small boat commanded by a man of the people, one of the rare loyal subjects, and the silent meeting of the war vessels full of treason and already given over to the enemy, that long sleepless night passed upon the deck in vain regrets, while exposed to the dampness of the breeze the tired Queen slept under the stars, and finally at sunrise the rock of Gaeta, the last refuge destined for the end of ruin, where royal dignity was obliged to submit itself to the conditions of a braggart soldier!

"Treason was everywhere like the smoke and smell of saltpetre," continued the prince, ever more disturbed by his bloody reminiscences, as he enlivened his speech from time to time with a gesture of the white hand on which the cameo shone, "the most terrible day of the siege was the 5th day of February, when the powder-magazine of the battery Sant' Antonio exploded, by treason."

"Oh what an atrocious thing," exclaimed Violante, shivering with a slight tremor and instinctively clos-

ing her ears with the palms of her hands, "What terror!"

"You remember it always," said her father, his eyes resting upon her with a sweeter expression.

"Always," she answered, hastily.

"Violante remained with us at Gaeta," he added, turning to me, "she was scarcely five years old and was the great pet of the Queen. The others had departed for Civitavecchia with the Countess di Trapani. We were in the soldier's prison, under the batteries of the sea-front."

"I remember everything," interrupted Violante, moved by a sudden animation that seemed to come to her from the great purple dazzling shed upon her distant childhood, "Everything, I remember all as if it had happened yesterday. The room was isolated by two partitions made of flags sewed together, I see the colors distinctly, they were signal flags, blue, yellow and red; the lights were lit because the palisades covered the windows, when the explosion occurred it might have been three or four o'clock of the afternoon. Nina Rizzo, the Queen's waitress, had just at that moment gone out. I held a cup of milk in my hands that the Sisters of the Hospital had sent me."

She spoke thus, with brief phrase and somewhat dull tone and spell-bound glance, revealing the precise particulars, one after the other, as if she saw them

in a succession of lightning flashes, and the images brought to mind by her thoughtful words were distinguished by an extraordinary power of relief upon the confused background of other images.

The woman and the old prince commemorating each in his turn the ruin and massacre, abolished, as it were, the vague, dimly-colored surroundings, and created a kind of smoky atmosphere in which my own soul respired anxiously.

They brought back the picture of the siege with all its horrors: the city encumbered with soldiers, horses, and mules, deprived of its provisions and funds, armed with weapons weak or useless, and harrassed by felony and typhus fever. The torrential rains filled it with a blackish mire, in the midst of which the starved beasts of burden wandered through the streets and fell down in agony; the iron hail, ever thicker and more resounding, perforated it, demolished it, ruined it, burned it, interrupted only by the brief truces granted for the burial of corpses already putrefied.

In the churches the divine function was celebrated and the Invincible Patron invoked; and meanwhile the stones became detached from the walls, broken glass fell everywhere, and the groans of the wounded, transported in hand-barrows, resounded on all sides.

The sick in the hospital raised up in their beds

when a bomb penetrated the wall on the thoroughfare side, and believing to die, shouted, "Long live the king!" A powder magazine unexpectedly blew up, shaking to its very foundations the city, which was suffocated with smoke and terror, while in the open gulf that the explosion created, ramparts, cannon, palisades, prisons, houses, and hundreds upon hundreds of men disappeared.

But at intervals, in the days of great sunshine, a sort of heroic delirium seized the besieged, something like an intoxication of death urged them to peril on the batteries, where the fire was most terrible. In sight of the enemy, at the sound of the fanfare, the artillerymen sang and danced frantically, and did one of them fall smitten the rejoicing increased.

A vast cry of joy and love welcomed the apparition of the queen on the esplanade where the shot was hailing: with the graceful freedom of her nineteen years, she advanced with an audacious step, smiling under the feathers of her hat, and girded by a corset refulgent as a corslet. Without a movement of the lashes at the whistling of the balls, she fixed upon the soldiers her glance, that was as intoxicating as the waving of flags, and under that gaze pride strove to widen the wounds, while those unhurt regretted not having the glory of a red spot. From time to time, men blood-spattered and powder-stained, with burn-

ing eyes in a blackened countenance, and with garments reduced to bits, as if by the jaws of a ruminant, threw themselves towards her from the cannons, calling her by name and kissing the hem of her gown.

"How beautiful she was, and how worthy of her throne!" exclaimed the prince, who recovered the most masculine accents of his voice in lauding that worth. "Her presence had a magnetic power upon the soldiers, and when she was there all became lions. The 22d of January was the most glorious of the siege because she remained upon the batteries until nightfall."

A pause almost of recollection succeeded, in which each of us in imagination contemplated the ideal figure of the heroine on a field of ruins and corpses.

"Tears were strangers to her eyes," said Violante, slowly, absorbed in distant memories, "at the last hour when I saw her weeping, I was as awed and astonished as if before an unforeseen and almost incredible fact. Kissing me, she made my face all wet,"

After an interval she added, "She wore a hat with a little green feather."

And a second or so later she continued:

"She had a great emerald at her throat."

Violante was seated at my side, and a certain disturbance invaded me when I bent involuntarily some-

what toward her, and breathed the perfume always a part of her, and which at this instant seemed to become stronger and dominate the honeyed fragrance of the flowers.

Present surroundings of beings and things inspired me with an unexpected aversion, gave me a sort of impatience and almost sharp disgust, as if at that moment they oppressed me and weighed me down the more, and I looked with an instinctive hostility upon the prince's first cousin, Ottavio Montaga, who, taciturn and sinister, like a masked man, was seated at the extremity of the table, forbidding, gloomy, inviolable.

I felt the hate of my health, my vigor, and my desire rise against the disease, the sadness, the extreme tedium in which the marvelous creature was wasting away without deliverance, and restraining the uneasiness generated previously in my spirit by the three different forms in their successive appearances, I believed to have already placed my choice upon her in whom all witcheries and even the solemnity of the past seemed to unite in ennobling.

Again she alone agitated my entire being just as when she raised her head at the cries of the falcons.

"Is it not singular, Claudio," said the prince, "that Violante preserves so clear a memory of that time? Does it not seem very singular to you?"

Then, smiling with his first sweet smile, he went on:

"Maria Sofia has never ceased to be most partial to Violante. Knowing her passion for odors, the Queen sends a great quantity of essences as a gift every year; she has not missed once all the time we have been here."

Turning tenderly to his daughter, he added:

"You would not be able to do without them now, would you?"

And to me he whispered with a shade of sadness:

"She lives upon them, and you can see, Claudio, how white she has become!"

But I thought I heard Anatolia whisper softly:

"She is dying from them."

When we arose from the table, Anatolia proposed to descend into the garden.

"Let us go down and get a little more sunshine," she said invitingly, raising her hand toward a sunbeam that penetrated the highest pane of a window that was not covered by the faded curtain, "who wants to come?"

Her hand sparkled in the motion and became gilded to the wrist, the rays wreathing around her fingers, flexible as osier withes.

"We will all come," I answered.

Don Ottavio asked permission and retired (his as-

pect among us was that of an intruder), but the prince, putting his arm under Anatolia's arm, as Antonello had already done on the terrace, said:

"I will accompany you as far down as the porch."

Passing through the vast audience-room, reduced now to an empty ante-chamber, I noted an old sedan-chair, furnished with two bars, that looked as if its burden might have either just alighted or was about to be received within its shelter.

"Who goes in the sedan-chair?" I asked, stopping.

"None of us," replied Anatolia, after an instant's hesitation, while over all their countenances passed a shade of agitation.

"It is from the time of Charles III.," said the prince, hiding his sadness with a smile. "It belonged to the Duchess of Cublana, Donna Raimondetta Montaga, who was the most beautiful woman of the Court, and was celebrated as the greatest beauty of the kingdom."

"It is of excellent style," I remarked, going nearer, attracted by that ancient object, that indeed did not seem to be lifeless, and to which under my glance the memory of Donna Raimondetta conferred a singular worth and grace, and almost a fictitious animation. "It is an exquisite work of art, and marvelously preserved."

But I felt that a strange inquietude occupied my

hosts, and that this was caused by the object before us, and so much the stronger then by virtue of mystery, I felt the life of my imagination to exist in the precious wood.

"Donna Raimondetta's soul abides within, perhaps," I said, with a light air, not being able to resist the wish to open the door of the conveyance; "it could not have a more elegant receptacle; let us see it."

As I opened, a subtle odor reached my nostrils, and to breathe it better, I thrust my head inside.

"What a perfume!" I exclaimed, delighted at the unlooked-for sensation. "Is it the fragrance of the Duchess of Cublana?"

And for some instants I held my spirit suspended in the delicate atmosphere created by the antique dame's fascination, imagining a small, round mouth, like a strawberry, a high head of powdered hair, and a gown of brocade set out by a hoop-petticoat.

The sedan-chair smelled like a wedding-chest, and was tapestried inside with green velvet of the color of willow leaves, and ornamented on each side by a small oval mirror, while outside it was gilded and painted all over with superfine taste, enriched in the cornices and in the framework by most delicate carving, which was rendered more harmonious and sweet to the sight

lly associations. In fact, a most admira-

able example of charming fancy and cunning workmanship.

"Or is it you, possibly, Donna Violante," I added, "who have emptied one of your vials on this tender velvet in homage to the famous grand-mother?"

"No, not I," said she, indifferently, the far-away look again upon her face, and the habitual listlessness taking possession of her.

"Shall we go now?" suggested Anatolia, drawing away her father, who was still at her arm. "It is always so cold in this great room."

"Let us go," repeated Antonello, shivering.

The rumor of the water could already be heard from the top steps, first hoarse, then ever clearer and stronger.

"Has the fountain been re-opened?" asked the prince.

"We opened it a while ago," said Anatolia, "in honor of the guest."

"Did you notice, Claudio, the play of the echoes in the court-yard?" inquired Don Luzio of me. "It is extraordinary."

"It is truly wonderful," I replied; "the effect of prodigious sonorousness, like an artifice of music. I think that an attentive harmonist would find here the secret of unknown chords and dissonances. It is an

incomparable school for a delicate ear, is it not so, Donna Violante? You were against Antonello, and for the fountain."

"Yes," she said, with simplicity, "I love and understand water."

"Praise be to you, O God! for Sister Water." Do you remember that, Donna Massimilla, in the Canticle of San Francesco?"

"Certainly," the betrothed of God replied to me, blushingly and with a smile; "I am a novice."

Her father gazed at her with tender melancholy in his glance.

"Sister Water," Anatolia called her, brushing back with her fingers the glossy waves of hair that descended upon Massimilla's temples, "take thou this name."

"That would be arrogance," said the nun with laughing humility.

She recalled again to my memory, with a slight variation, the sentence in the Beata, *symphonialis est aqua.*

We were all there close to the clamorous fountain, where every mouth gave forth its notes through a glass pipe like a bent flute: the basin underneath was already full and the four marine horses stood submerged to their paunches.

"The design is from Algardi of Bologna," said the

prince, "the architect of Innocent X., but the sculptures were executed by the Neapolitan, Domenico Guidi, the same who did the great part of the high relief of Attila at St. Peter's."

Violante had approached the edge of the basin, and I looked upon her image reflected in the liquid sphere, where a continuous trembling shifted her outlines between the horse's hoofs.

"A tragic episode is attached to this fountain," remarked the prince, "an episode which was afterwards the motive of a superstitious belief. Do you not know it?"

"No, I do not," I replied; "but if it does not displease you, relate it to me."

And I glanced at Antonello, remembering the lost soul that tormented him and frightened him at night. He, too, had turned his eyes intently upon the reflection of Violante trembling upon the background of water.

"Here in this basin Pantea Montaga drowned to death," commenced Don Luzio, "at the time of the Viceroy Pietro of Arragon."

He broke off suddenly and exclaimed:

"I will tell it to you some other time."

Understanding that he hesitated to resuscitate that memory in the presence of his daughters, I did not insist.

But shortly afterwards in the outer vestibule, walking slowly alone upon my arm, he took up the tale again, while all around us the sun glittered upon the line of balustrades, and the tall white statues of the seasons contemplating the Saurgo's tawny valley.

It was a drama of passion and of death, mental and secret, well worthy of the chaste stone cloister that in rapid succession had sheltered it and fostered its violence. It signified to me the power exercised by the genius of association upon a sympathetic soul, through whom, thereupon, each truthful sentiment would be concentrated to the extreme intensity supportable by human nature, that afterwards it might express all of its force in an act definite and of a certain consequence.

Listening to the prince's imperfect recital, I mentally reconstructed the hour of essential, unmixed life that had produced Pantea's death, and in my eyes the nocturnal crime assumed a beauty that pointed out things profound and penetrating.

Of such quality, in truth, must have been the will of that Umbelino who, kindled with unsatisfied love for an unknowing sister, decided to remain alone in his fault and meditated killing her, that he might divide from the soul that flesh that had inflamed him so terribly with desire and be able to contaminate that alone with his caresses.

"He must have drawn marvelous tremors and thrills from his secret," thought I, reflecting upon the thin, olive-hued face that my mind invented. "As an unknown sorcery had infused the impure fire in his blood, he recognized as the object of his lust only the bodily covering that enveloped the inviolable soul, and knew afterwards how to separate distinctly one from the other with the force of his thought, and contain in himself two loves at the same time, the profane and the sacred.

What must have been his shiver of horror, when in the instants that the fever, nourished by the invisible emanations of the body present before him, was devouring him most strongly, he heard the sister's dear soul uttering sweet words from those same lips that in dreams he covered with luxurious kisses!

In what a frightful vortex his inner life must have wheeled like a whirlwind, with never a respite, multiplied as it was by solitude, and made denser by constriction!

Finally, when he felt the yoke of destiny that rendered the crime necessary grow heavier, he meditated doing away with Pantea's fatal beauty, and resolved to reduce her to an insensible husk by means of death.

How many tokens of pity and of sorrow he lavished in silence upon the poor innocent creature who

was soon to disappear, to vanish, that he might be left with the passionately longed-for burden in his arms!

Of course he said ineffable things to her as he accompanied her to the chapel for morning prayer, such as:

"O Pantea, nothing on earth is sweeter than thy prayer! The dew is less sweet."

This was that she might pray longer and more fervidly, and perhaps to prepare her to depart this life, he added:

"O Pantea, how blessed thou art! The place for thy soul is the bosom of Our Lord Jesus Christ!"

But he whispered to himself unspeakable things that she could not hear, and one summer evening, full of fatal fascination, the hour of death vibrated.

Everything was as improbable and favorable as in a dream; both stood near the eloquent fountain and noiselessly refreshed their hands in the wet shadow. A hellish fever burned in the pulses of Umbelino as he kept his eyes fixed upon the image of Pantea, mirrored in the water under the light of the stars, and with the same facility with which he might have broken the stem of a lily, his hands bent Pantea towards the image until one became confused with the other, and the fountain held a whitish corpse.

Prince Luzio took leave of me, saying:

"I hope that from to-day you may feel this house to be as your own, and whenever you may come, you will be welcome, my dear son. Therefore do not make yourself too much desired; do not stay away too long."

It made me so sad to see him enter that desolate palace alone, that I accompanied him a little ways, talking with him affectionately. We paused before the fountain, and I could almost see in its glassy clearness Pantea's baleful beauty, and the rounded, hollow hands on a level with the water like two magnolia petals, and the soft head of hair fluttering under the horse's hoofs.

"There was a legend during the years that followed," said the prince, smiling, with a vague gesture towards the basin, "that on moonless nights the soul of Pantea sang until dawn at the top of the fountain jet, and that of Umbelino despaired within the throats of the beasts of stone."

The yearning of spring-time came up to us as we stood bending over the balusters that sloped towards the garden; a kind of vibrating breeze enwrapped us with the celerity of a feverish pulse, and the sensation was so continuously strong that it stupefied the nerves. The pupils of the eyes became

fixed and the eyelids lowered, as in the beginning of lethargy, and I felt my soul heavy with gloom.

Anatolia broke our harmonious silence by saying:

"Happiness is passing."

Her unexpected words revealed to ourselves the anxiety that was within us, and expressed the essence of infinite melancholy diffused when the earth is upon the point of its renewal.

"Happiness is passing."—

"Which hands will be able to seize and hold it?" I asked myself suddenly, mysteriously agitated by my need of love, and my deepest instincts, in a confused insurrection.

The three sisters leaned their elbows upon the stone edge, and held their naked ringless hands over it, immersed in the sunshine as in a tepid golden bath, Massimilla with her fingers woven together, Anatolia with one palm crossed upon the other so that the two thumbs overtopped, Violante crushing some already withered violets from her waist, and then letting them fall into space.

"Whose would be the hands able to hold it?" I wondered.

Anatolia's appeared the strongest and most sensitive: the fingers jewelled with rosy nails which were distinct from the whitish lunella at the root, like a double cameo, and the muscles and tendons that

strengthened the thumbs were strongly drawn under the skin. Had they not already communicated to me in the first contact a sense of generous force and of efficacious goodness? Had I not already believed to feel a vivifying warmth in the hollow of her palm?

But those of Massimilla seemed uncreated, like the forms of apparitions, so slender were they; even the sunbeams could not golden their whiteness, and so manifest were they to me that I saw again in the full light of day the dark shadows of the apse where, within the altar's enclosure, I had seen them for the first time sole survivors of an image reabsorbed from mystery and adapted solely for the enchanting and caressing of souls.

To-day the twined fingers expressed the bond of voluntary slavery, and their attitude seemed to say:

"I am Thine, bound by a tie stronger than any chain. I will open my arms only when Thou art pleased to unloose me. I wish for nothing but to worship and obey, to obey and worship."

This is what the devotee seemed to confess to her ideal Lord, but I imagined her hands unfettered, and from their palms long bands of living silence produced, in like manner to the light inscription-scrolls, bearing some little verse, and enclosing history within the mystical sense of the written words,

that are portioned out from the palms of the angels sculptured high and low upon the ancon.

And my soul cried out to her:

"Thus, O Worshipper, thou couldst include my meditating spirit in the circles of thy living silence of love, and I will be unfaithful to the solitudes of earth, to the solemn mountains, the musical woods, the peaceful streams, and even to the starry heavens, for no earthly spectacle can so elevate the genius of man as the presence of a beautiful conquered soul. To the walls of the secret chamber this presence gives an illimitable vastness, as a votive lamp augments the grandeur of night in a temple.

"For that, O sweet slave, I would have thee in my home: he who meditates, surrounded by a silent adoration, feels the divinity of his thought, and creates like a god."

But Violante's sublime hands, crushing the essential drop from the tender flowers and letting them fall bruised to the earth, accomplished an act that as a symbol responded perfectly to the quality of my character—extracted the last odor of life, took from the thing all that it could give and left it exhausted. Was not such one of the gravest duties of my art of living?

Violante then appeared to me as the divine and incomparable instrument of my art.

"Her alliance is necessary to me," I whispered to myself, "to know and exhaust the innumerable occult secrets in the depths of human senses, of which everlasting wantonness is the only revealer. The tangible flesh hides infinite mysteries that the contact alone of another flesh can reveal to one endowed by Nature with the power to understand and religiously celebrate them.

"And has not her body the sancity and magnificence of a temple? Does not her beauty promise the highest initiations to my sensuality?"

Again, as when we had first ascended the staircase, I was attracted towards the three entire forms that offered to all the powers of my being the joy of manifesting themselves, and of totally satisfying it in a finished harmony.

The one—in my dream—with the pure forehead radiant with presentiments, watched over the child of my blood and of my soul; the other, like the fabulous insect in the metallurgist's furnace, lived in the familiar fire of my thoughts, while the third called me back to the religious worship of the body, and agreed with me in secret ceremonies which should teach me to revive the life of the ancient gods.

All seemed born to serve my wishes of perfection on earth, and to separate them one from the other

"Why do you always repeat that?" I asked him, in gentle reproof. "How do you know?"

"No one ever knows anything," murmured Oddo, with his dull voice that I distinguished from his brother's only by the motion of the lips. "Who can say what will happen to us from now until autumn? Massimilla only is sure, she has found her refuge."

A slight accent of bitterness tinged the last words.

"Massimilla goes to pray for us," said Anatolia, gravely.

The novice lowered her head towards her linked hands, and for an interval we were silent, while a wave of things indistinct, but nevertheless authoritative, swept over us.

The dazzling vision of the autumnal purple made the clear spring noon pale before my eyes while we descended the stone stairs, where some hours before the three princesses, issuing with a fresh smile from a night of immemorial affliction, had appeared to me like the beginning of a fable, and already that morning hour seemed as far off as did the autumn, to which, according to a gloomy presentiment, the vicissitudes of a menacing fate were to conduct me, seem near. If I imagined the purplish foliage around the naked tendrils, I also saw fall upon the countenances of the three sisters a dark shadow of mourning.

Another time the sentiment of death so impassioned and elevated my soul that all appearances were reflected as if transfigured by poesy. In the splendor of the spring air those frail creatures seemed to me "marvelously sad," like the women in the dream of the *Vita Nuova*, that Massimilla had recalled to my memory among the cut almond branches and the old mirrors. And all seemed to me to be comprised in the burning spirit that inflames the page of young Dante's declaration, where he shows that he knows how to agitate his soul from the depths, and exhalt it to the heights of sorrowful delirium, imagining Beatrice dead, and contemplating her face through a funeral veil.

"Breathing strongly," the quotation runs, "I said within myself, 'Of a truth, this delicate Beatrice must die some day,' and trembling with fear I imagined some friend coming to me and saying: 'Do you not know of it? Your admirable lady has departed this life?' Then it appeared to me that my heart, bursting with love, repeated to me: 'It is true that our lady is lying dead.'"

Did not the force of unspeakable inward perfection come to me from a like imagination?

A sovereign nobility emanated from every act of the morient maidens, irradiating all through which they passed, and perhaps I never saw them in so much light or so much shadow.

When we were at the foot of the terrace stairs, upon a landing surrounded by the green fury of a vestibule of box-trees, Anatolia stopped, asking me:

"Would you not like to see all the garden? Perhaps you may recover some memories."

And, almost declaring her sovereignty, Violante added:

"Since you love the water's music, I will take you to visit my seven fountains."

And Massimilla, with her timid gentleness:

"In return for the almonds, I will show you to-day a white hawthorn down there full of flowers."

One would think they spoke of their most intimate belongings, and, like the virgins of Fontebranda, meant to say:

"We are a garden!"

Not being able to express my sentiment, I uttered vain words instead.

"Lead on, then," I said; "some memory will certainly be found, that of my first reading, at least, which were all fairy tales."

"Poor tales without foundation," said Oddo, taking Anatolia's hand with a caressing gesture, while despair smiled in their eyes.

Then Violante led us through what was almost a labyrinth.

We went through the perennial green, among the

boxwood trees, the laurels and the ancient myrtle, whose wild old age was unmindful of the discipline endured, for only here and there remained some vestige of the symmetrical forms once treated by the gardeners' scissors, and with a melancholy not unlike that of him who seeks the worn-out image of neglected dead, upon the marbles of sepulchres, I was quick to recognize in the mute plants the humanity of these tokens of the past not yet entirely disappeared.

A bitter-sweet odor accompanied our steps. From time to time some one of us, as if to restore a woof destroyed, put together a remembrance of far-off childhood, and here the phantom of my mother revived most purely and stood before me, seeming to be nourished upon everything that our hearts breathed out in the suspended silences and never detaching herself from Anatolia's side, as if to designate whom her choice would be. A bitter-sweet sentiment seemed also to accompany our melancholy.

Stopping an instant, Violante asked me with almost the aspect and the accent with which she had spoken to me at the window:

"Do you hear?"

"Now we are in your dominion," I said to her, "because you are the queen of fountains."

We were in a small meadow sprinkled with jonquils

and guarded by a statue of Pan entirely green with moss, and the hoarse voice of the water-sprays could be heard coming through a high hedge of myrtles; a delicious tenderness ascended into my veins from the soft grass that my feet pressed, and, anew, a sudden joy of life swelled my lungs.

The presence of the two brothers wearied me, and my pity for them became even stronger.

"Ah, how I could stir your souls to the very utmost!" I thought, looking at the three fair prisoners; "how I could exasperate the unrest that is in you to anguish!"

And I imagined the voluptuousness of tasting those new souls, full of unmixed sap; those rarest fruits slowly matured in the garden of self-knowledge, and yet intact to be offered to my desire.

But the sorrow was greater because I knew that afterwards that singular spell, that is only formed from the novelty of first communications between beings whose destinies are to be joined, could not be re-established; that strange, short spell mixed with wonder, presentiment, hope, expectation, and a thousand indefinable things, vain, although risen from the most sacred abysses of life and participating of the nature of dreams.

Everything was rich and tranquil in the transparence of ærial amber, and ideas of beauty that were

asking to be gathered bloomed everywhere, while the most magnificent flowered at the feet of the desolate princesses, where I thought of myself as stooping to pluck them; I imagined the pleasure of caressing and exciting those souls which had so long wandered in a secret cloister, over which the phantoms of ancient Seasons wove a veil of poesy, tracing within it, with scarcely visible threads, the strange countenances of unknown creatures, laughing, crying in the alternations of joy and of sorrow.

Did not a Pantea, pale victim of a passion at once heinous and sublime, sing in each one of these fountains?

A strange sentiment penetrated me when Violante led me beyond the myrtles in the long space comprised between the eastern wall and the hedge of shrubs, reigned over by that mysterious spirit that occupies remote places where lovers, celebrated for the tragic splendor of their destinies, are said to have assembled and conversed.

The statues, the columns, the tree trunks had the look of things that were witnesses and accomplices of some grand human delirium whose memory they would perpetuate for years. The profound injuries of voracious Time and inclement seasons bestowed upon the forms of stone those expressions and that eloquence that ruins alone possess, and the expres-

sion of the interrupted lines gave rise to many lofty thoughts.

The voluptuous wish to confess in that place to the three virgins my magnificent dream that they alone could transform into living harmony, became stronger, as I thought of the sensual pleasure of uttering words of love in that spot where was united such purity of types as to exalt souls beyond the commonplace human anguish and expand them into a supreme heaven of beauty.

We went slowly, stopping from time to time and proffering words that dissembled the disquiet which agitated us. Oddo and Antonello, showing themselves to be tired, remained some steps behind, and I felt as if I were followed by the shadows of sickness and of death.

My fervor had abated, for I felt how hard was the contrast between my impetuous animation and those miserable necessities which remained changeless at my side, around me, in every part of that great cloister full of forgotten and extinct things. I felt that each one of those creatures, already so many times illuminated by my intellect and transfigured by my desire, preserved her secret intact, and that the language of her presence could not be revealed.

Gazing at them, I saw each distant to each other,

each strange to the other, each with an unknown thought between eyebrow and eyebrow, each with an unknown sentiment locked within her heart.

I was about to go away, to return to my solitude, our day was nearing its end.

What new things had that first communication stimulated in souls wearied by long practice of a sadness not more illusory, perhaps, than a last hope in an unforeseen issue? In what light did I appear to each of them? Did their need of love and of happiness stretch out towards me with an unrestrainable impulse, or did a mistrustful incredulity like that of the two brothers pervade them?

They walked pensively at my side, and when they spoke, seemed so deeply absorbed, that more than once I was on the point of calling out:

"What are you thinking of?" And a violent, rapacious wish was born in me against that secret that they smothered, and those rash words, that can suddenly open a closed heart, surprise its most hidden sorrow, or force it to confess itself, rose to my lips, while at the same time a pitying tenderness bent me towards them almost to ask pardon for the evil they would undergo from me on that point and for the harsher evil they would be obliged to undergo from me in the future.

For the necessity of choice presented itself before

me as a cruel experiment, a cause of sorrow and of inevitable sacrifices.

"What are you thinking of?" I longed to cry. "Do I not feel a vehement anxiety fill the pauses of our useless dialogue?"

"Oh, when will summer come?" sighed Violante, after a pause, raising her eyes towards the large umbrella pines. "In summer I pass every day here, alone with my fountains, and it is the time of tube-roses!"

Giant pines, with straight round shafts like the sail-yards of a galley, were planted at equal distances, and stretched along the cloister wall, to protect it with their opaque domes, while between each tree-trunk, as in an intercolumniation, the wall was hollowed into niches to receive statues, either naked or wrapped in peplus, whose calm attitudes bore visions of the past in their divine infatuation.

At equal distances the seven fountains projected in the form of small temples in the space comprised between two frames of columns that upheld a pediment upon which a distich was sculptured, each fountain being composed of a spacious cup, in which might be seen divinities seated upon the margin and leaning towards the water-urn.

The high hedge of myrtles entirely green, rose opposite, its virescence broken only by the thoughtful, musing white pillars, and the damp ground almost

wholly covered with moss like a felt, which rendered our steps silent and augmented the sweetness of mystery.

"Can you succeed in reading those verses?" asked Violante, seeing me intent upon deciphering the letters cut into the stone, which here and there were blotted out by incrustations and clefts. "I once knew what they said."

They read thus:

> "Make haste, make haste,
> Weave garlands of beautiful roses,
> To embrace the hours that pass."

Præcipitate moras, volucres cingatis vt horas nectite formosas, mollia serta, rosas.

It was sweetened by rhyme, but it was the ancient admonition that for centuries had incited men to the pleasures of a short life, had inflamed kisses upon the lips of lovers and multiplied bowls of wine upon banquet boards. It was the ancient, voluptuous melody, attuned to the new idea that an industrious monk had brought to life in the form of a dove's wing, composed of unequal reeds cut from Pan's abandoned kitchen-garden, and woven together with the wax of little votive torches, and with the linen of a worn-out altar cloth.

"The fountain sparkles and echoes," read another

couplet, "and in its splendor says to thee 'enjoy,' and in its murmur tells thee 'love!'"

Fons lvcet, plavde, eloquitvr fons lvmine:
Gavde. Fons sonat, adclama, mvrmvre dicit: ama.

The echoes of the macaronic rhyme upon which the waters interminably commented, spread an ambiguous enchantment over my spirit, and I felt in those echoes the veiled accent of melancholy that gives an indefinite grace to pleasure, and even interrupting it renders it more profound. Not less delicate and sad were the divine youthful women, who stretched out their nude limbs there upon the fountain brinks, undulating in resemblance to the mirror in which they had so long beheld themselves.

Salmacises were they, perhaps, greedy for the perfection of a union yet unknown to men and gods? Or *Bibli*, perhaps, ready to restrain the fire of incestuous love in the virginal breast? or Arethusas, bowing like flexible willows under the violence of an arrogant love repulsed in vain?

"Weep here," ran a third distich, "oh lovers who come to quench your thirst. Too sweet is this water, temper it with the salt of your tears."

Flete hic potantes, nimis est aqua dolcis, amantes.
Salsos, vt apta veham, temperet homor eam.

Thus the sweet fountain, envying the savor of

tears, pointed out to the joyful the subtile art of tasting some bitterness in the midst of happiness, as it went on:

"It is proper to mingle with the roses some rose-like flower of dreadful hellebore almost indistinct in the garland, that from time to time the crowned head may droop."

By means of these inscriptions it appeared that step by step through the long path of love, voluptuousness became more comprehensive, wiser, and more impassioned. The liquid mirrors invited lovers to rest heads heavy with revelry and dreams, and to contemplate their own images, that, reaching finally the point where they seemed to behold only unknown beings, issued from the light of an inaccessible world, they might better feel that which was inexpressibly strange and far-off in their lives.

"Bow down and reflect yourself, in order that your kisses be doubled by the images."

Oscvla ivcvnda vt dvplicentvr imagine in vnda,
Vvltvs hic vero cernite fonte mero.

In that simple act was not something abstruse revealed?

The two lovers, bent over to gaze upon their reflected caress, unconsciously signified the mystical power of voluptuousness, that of expelling for some minutes the unknown man that we bear within our-

selves, and of making us feel as far-off and strange as a phantom.

Is not delirium heightened in the obscurity of such a sentiment, and does it not produce the terror of the lustful who in the mirrors of deep alcoves regard their mutual embraces repeated by figures that resemble them in a supernatural silence, and yet seem indefinitely unlike and remote?

Having a confused knowledge of the extraordinary alienation that has come to pass in them, they think to find a shining symbol of it in those external images, and by the analogy are no longer induced to consider them as visual appearances, but as forms of inexplicable life, and finally as aspects of death, when the exhausted bodies become immobile upon the white sheet, the perspiration chills the back, and the pupils contract under the weight of the eyelids. . . . . .

Such a vision was created in me by the rhymes of the last silver-toned fountain upon which Violante's countenance was turned, while the shadows of the pines slowly descended like an azure film.

I read and re-read them:

"Here Voluptuousness and Death united regard each other, and their two faces become as one."

Spectarvnt nvptas hic se mors atqve Volvptas. Vnvs (fama ferat), qvvm dvo, vvltvs erat.

As the sun was obscured by the passage of a soft, white cloud, the air grew sweeter, assuming almost the savor of transparent milk in which an aroma was dissolved, and as we traversed the enclosed meadows, yellow with jonquils, where it was easy to imagine pastoral feasts under garlanded pavilions, the cadence of some old Latin rhymes was ever in my ears. Upon the pedestal of an armless nymph was sculptured the undertaking of the Arcadi, the fountain of seven reeds within a wreath of laurel.

"Were you not here this morning?" I asked Violante, recognizing in the vicinity the arch of box-wood trees where she had first appeared to me.

She smiled, and her cheeks colored vividly as if caressed by a transient flame, but a few hours had passed and I was stupefied to have missed the exact conception of time. That brief interval was so full of confused events that it gave to my conscience an illusory duration without positive limits. I could not yet measure the gravity of the life that I had lived in that cloister from the moment in which my foot paused upon its threshold, but I felt that something obscure of incalculable consequences was about to be determined in me independently of my own will, and my morning presentiment, alone upon the solitary road, seemed not to have been fallacious.

"Why don't we sit down a little?" asked Anto-

nello almost entreatingly; "are you not tired?"

"Let us sit for a while, then," assented Anatolia with her usual sweet compliance; "I, too, am a little tired, the effect of the spring, perhaps. What an odor of violets!"

"But your white hawthorn," I exclaimed, turning to Massimilla to show her that I had not forgotten her offer.

"It is yet quite a ways off," she answered.

"Where?"

"Down there, yonder."

"Massimilla has her hiding-corners," laughed Anatolia, "when she hides herself, no one can find her."

"Like an ermine," I added.

"Then," she continued, jokingly, "now and then, she makes a mysterious allusion to some little marvel known to her alone, but prudently, however, always preserving the secret, and never conceding anything to our curiosity. You, to-day, regarding the white hawthorn, are the object of a special favor."

The novice did not raise her eyes, but a smile sparkled in her eye-brows, illuminating her entire face.

"Some day," continued the good sister, who appeared content to have awakened that unusual beam, "some day I will tell you the story of the hedge-hog and the four little blind hedge-hogs."

Massimilla broke into a laugh so youthful and so

clear, arraying herself with such unforeseen freshness, that before her I was as astonished as at a miracle of grace.

"Oh don't listen to Anatolia," she exclaimed without looking at me, "she wants to laugh at me."

"The story of the hedge-hog and the four little hedge-hogs!" said I drinking with delight from that vein of sudden hilarity which traversed the sweet melancholy of our companion, "then you are a model of Franciscan perfection! We must add a small flower to the *Fioretti*, 'How Sister Water tamed the wild hedge-hog and built it a nest in order that it might multiply according to the commandments of our Creator.' Tell it, tell it!"

The novice laughed with Anatolia, and that slender spirit of joy communicated itself also to Violante and the two brothers, and for the first time that day we recognized that we were young.

Who can ever tell how sweet and strange is the unexpected discovery of a smile upon the lips and in the eyes of the sorrowing? My soul persisted in its first stupor that seemed to cover all else with a veil. The unusual agitation that for some instants had shaken Massimilla's delicate breast, spread within me to all prior images, disconcerting their outlines or dissipating them. A silvery peal of laughter had suddenly filled the slightly opened mouth of the de-

vout, religious maiden, had interrupted her in the act of producing spheres of silence from the immobile palms of her hands!

Nothing could have so signified to me the inaccessible depth of mystery each one of the three virgins bore in herself, as the sound of that laughter. Was not that the chance sign of an instinctive life, sleeping like a treasure accumulated in the root itself of animal substance? And did not that opaque, tenacious life, upon which even the knowledge of so much sorrow weighed without suffocating it, enclose germs of innumerable energies?

As a spring brings to arid rock the indication of secret, subterranean humidity, so did the beautiful, sudden smile appear to well up from that nucleus of native joy that every most miserable creature preserves in the interior of his own unconsciousness. Thus, upon my emotion a thought of love and pride became clear, and I whispered to myself, "I could make of thee a being of joy."

Then my eyes became armed with a new curiosity, and an uneasy, burning wish assailed me to examine, to consider the three persons more attentively; I noted once more what an arduous enigma of outlines every feminine form may be, and how difficult it is to *see* not even the souls, but the bodies. Those hands, in fact around whose long fingers I had girdled like

invisible rings my most subtle dreams, already seemed to me different, appearing like the receptacles of infinite, unnamed forces, from which could issue marvelous generations of new things.

And, by a strange analogy, I imagined the anxiety and the honor of that young prince, who, being confined in a most gloomy spot, with the necessity of choosing his fate from among the unknowable destinies brought to him by taciturn messengers, passed the entire night feeling the fatal hands stretched towards him in the darkness.

The hands in the darkness—does there exist a more frightful image of mystery?

Those of the three marriageable princesses rested naked in the light, and, looking at them, I thought of the numberless uncreated attitudes that were in them, and of the myriad unborn leaves that were in the garden.

Anatolia, perceiving my intent gaze, smiled.

"Why do you look at our hands so strangely?" she asked. "Are you perhaps a palmist?"

"I am a palmist," I answered in fun.

"Read our fortunes, then."

"Show me the left palm."

She held out her palm and her sisters imitated her act, while I bent over, pretending to explore in each the lines of life, of marriage, and of happiness.

"What destinies!" I thought in the meantime, before those three beautiful hands stretched out as if to receive or offer, while the pause fed my inquietude with a thousand unexpressed and inexplicable things that were produced by itself. 'What destinies! Perhaps those sudden changes, to which the inclination of magnetic needles is subject, may happen also to the cruel iron of fate. Perhaps all the desires that I bear within myself, obscure or clear, are already exercising their commutative virtues; and the destinies digress, approaching towards a final event from which I will draw my advantage, but it may also be that I am the toy of an illusion produced by my pride and by my faith, and that my present state is only that of a prisoner among prisoners."

The silence was very great during this pause—such, that in its perception I was dismayed before the immensity of mute things that it embraced.

The sun was still veiled, when suddenly Antonello leaped up, turning himself rapidly towards the palace with the action of one who hears a call. All of us gazed at him wonderingly, and he looked back at us with bewildered eyes. The sisters drew back their hands.

"Well?" interrogated Anatolia, with a shadow of

preoccupation upon her forehead. "What have you read?"

"I have read," I replied, "but I cannot reveal."

"Why?" and she smiled again. "Is what you know so terrible?"

"It is not terrible," I said; "instead, it is joyous."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"For all of us, or for me alone?"

I hesitated an instant. With the demand she unconsciously penetrated my perplexity and reminded me of the necessary choice.

"You do not answer," she added.

"For all," I responded.

"For me, too?" asked Massimilla, dreamingly.

"For you, too. Do you not take the veil by your own choice, and are you not sure to arrive at last at the beatitudes that recompense total renunciation?"

As I met her glance her face became dyed with a red that seemed almost violent in that pallor.

"Be that odoriferous flower that you ought to be, and cast fragrance in the sweet sight of God. Santa Caterina has written that for you."

"You know Santa Caterina?" and the novice thrilled with wonder under her blushes.

"She is my chosen saint," I added, glad to see her so

astonished, and tempted by the pleasure of disturbing and dazzling that soul that seemed to me ardent and insecure. "I love her for her purple presence. In the Garden of Self-Knowledge she is like a rose of fire."

The betrothed of Jesus looked at me increduously, but the desire to interrogate and to listen was painted upon her countenance, and a slender shadow on her forehead already indicated the furrow of attention.

"The book I had with me this morning," she said, with a slight tremor in her voice as if she revealed to me some intimacy, "was a volume of her Letters."

"I noticed that, like a good Franciscan, you put a blade of grass between the pages as a sign, but that volume needs another book-mark, the grass burns there as upon the edge of a furnace, the essence of the third order is all in those words of hers: 'Fire and blood united for love!' Have you them in mind?"

"Oh, Massimilla," interrupted Oddo, laughing; "you can dismiss the spiritual father, here you have found a true guide for the road to perfection."

We were seated upon the edge of a dried-up basin that was perhaps an ancient fish-pond, almost entirely filled up with earth and possessed by wild plants, in the midst of which the violets hid themselves, certainly very numerous judging by the great fragrance.

Opposite, near by, was the wall of decrepit box-wood trees, that already, upon my first entrance, had breathed towards me the same perfume through its deep fissures, and through the arch and the apertures might be perceived the deserted pathway with its mutilated statues and its stripped urns.

"Is the day already fixed for you to take the veil?" I asked Massimilla.

"The day is not yet fixed," she answered, "but it will certainly be before Easter."

"So soon, then? It is too soon."

Antonello again rose to his feet, suddenly agitated by an unwarrantable uneasiness, and we all turned towards him, while he gazed at Anatolia with a vague bewilderment in his pale eyes. Then he sat down again, but an indefinite sense of evil pervaded us all as if Antonello had communicated to us some part of his anxiety.

"Yesterday at this time we were in the almond-field," said Oddo, with an accent of sorrow for a past pleasure in his voice, and Antonello's words, "we must bring them beneath these flowers," rose spontaneously to my memory.

"We must all return there," I broke in, vivaciously rending that strange atmosphere of anxiety and fear, that without manifest cause was thickening over our souls; "we must enjoy all that there is of this sweet

spring-time. Within a week all the valley will be in bloom. I propose that we take a run through it all, ascend the Corace, and see Scultro, Secli and Linturno again. . . . . How happy I should be to have your company! Would you not be willing to come? I hope that you, Donna Anatolia, will set a good example, and be the first to consent."

"Certainly I will," she answered; "you offer us our desire."

"And to you, too, Donna Massimilla, will be permitted the recreation. San Francesco, as you know, composed the Canticle of the Sun in the cell of reeds and canes that Santa Clara had built for him within the monastery orchard. The woods, the streams, the mountains, the hills, ought to be your brothers and sisters according to the ancient Order. To seek them is to accomplish a votive visitation, and then at Linturno, the dead city, the nave of a church is still standing, and there alone in the ceiling of the apse is a great Madonna of mosaic. I remember it always; it is unforgettable. Do you remember it, Antonello?"

Hearing his name pronounced, Antonello started up excitedly.

'What are you saying?" he stammered, confused, and his poor contracted face expressed such suffering that I remained without words.

"Yes, yes; we had better go," he added, feigning to have understood, and a prey to manifest agitation he arose anew with the aspect of a maniac, ashy and staggering. "We had better go away from here; Anatolia, get up!"

He spoke in a subdued tone, as if in fear of being heard by some one in the neighborhood, and filled us with amazement.

"Get up, Claudio; we had better go away from here."

Anatolia ran to him and seized his hands.

"Here she is! She is coming!" he muttered, beside himself, turning his pale eyes, dilated with hallucination, towards the pathway.

"Here she is! Do you hear?"

Perplexed and disturbed, I at first believed that he was terrified by a spectre produced from his own delusion, but my ear also caught the rumor of approaching footsteps, and all at once I understood, as I saw the sedan-chair appear between the box-wood trees.

We remained there speechless, immovable, holding our breath during the passage of the strange convoy, and in the icy silence, like that which surrounds a funeral bier, the light creaking made by the abrasion of the bars borne by the two servants could be distinctly heard.

Through the aperture of the doorway, against the background of greenish velvet, I then saw the face of the demented princess, unrecognizable, disfigured by a bloodless swelling, like a mask of snow, her hair, raised up in front after the manner of a diadem, while the great black eyes maintained, perhaps, in their extraordinary magnificence by the continual vision of unheard of and wonderful pageantry, glittered in the opaque whiteness of the flesh, under the imperious arch of the eyebrows.

The flesh of the chin wrinkled over the necklaces with which the throat was girdled, and that pallid, inert enormity resuscitated in my imagination some figure, dreamed of the old Byzantine empress at the time of a Nicephorus or Basil, stretched within her golden litter, fat and ambiguous as a eunuch.

"Now she will discover us, will stop, descend and come to us," I whispered in growing anxiety to myself, almost awaiting the proof of what seemed to be an improbable form, on the point of dissolving into inexistence, like a dream into awakening.

"She at least will call some one, will commence to talk, will ask who I am, and interrogate me," I imagined as I listened in that silence for the real sound of that voice, for the dialogue between those children oted to an inhuman sacrifice, and that mother of her madness, had passed away from

this world to another into which she was inevitably to attract one after the other of her offspring, and from my own horror I understood the profound shiver of instinctive repugnance that had been a mysterious warning to Antonello, scarcely different from that which assails a herd of cattle in an enclosure at the approach of the foe that will devour them.

But she passed without perceiving us, without a movement of the eyelids, and disappeared from sight among the high box-wood trees. Two sad, taciturn servants, faded from tedium and fatigue, and dressed in gray like lay-sisters, followed close to the sedan-chair, their arms, which hung limply at their sides, like dead things, moving with every step like the rosaries suspended from their waists.

I saw again in memory the swollen, bloodless face of the Princess Aldoina, the mournful weariness of the servants, the two gray, ghost-like followers, and every phase of the strange convoy as I rode homeward along the road to Rebursa, and although some living part of me had remained in the great cloister, I nevertheless felt an inward joy in being once more alone.

I saw again the gestures of dismissal at the gate, the marvelous depths in the eyes of the fair prisoners, the almost mythical distances of the garden

vanishing behind their beautiful persons, and at the same time all the other phantoms of intense life seen by me in those brief hours, accumulated in my soul like changeful, indistinct riches gathered that they might ornament my secret residence.

"What sumptuousness!" said the demon, appearing to me with gladness and pride. "What magnificences in a single day! Thou couldst not better serve thy scope than by vivifying all, and extracting life from everything most arid. Dost thou not recognize the wisdom of my morning admonition? Dost thou not bless the rigors of thy long discipline whence thou hast this fruit that inebriates thee? Thy poesy like thy will is without limits. All that is born and exists about thee is so through a breath of thy will and thy poesy. Nevertheless thou livest in the order of most royal things, as nothing in the world may be more regal than a thing poetical."

Day was declining over the undulated valley of the Saurgo, and in the oblique rays the tawny earth became enriched with gold, while the bright clouds, lying in feminine attitude round about the summits of the rocks as they might upon the highest steps of an amphitheatre, were awaiting the evening to clothe them with purple.

"Now thou couldst make judgment fruitful," said the demon to me. "There where thy spirit is inclin-

ing fertility expands all at once, but thou hast with thee the favor of Fortune, for thou hast entered into the unknown and the unforeseen not as one who uncertainly attempts and explores, but like him who, being prudent, is chosen for the harvest in a field where the superbest maturity is assembled, yet intact and ready to fill the hollow of his hands as many times as it pleases him to stretch them out in the light and in the shadow.

"Thou hast entered a closed garden delicious and frightful as that of the ancient Hesperides; happiness, between madness and death, like that sculptured marble that glitters between two black columns, has smiled upon thee through three faces. Is there not a hidden sense for thee in the composition of such a thought?"

"Oh despot," I answered to him, "there is certainly a hidden sense in the figure thou hast illustrated to me, and I will know it, but since the perfection of that trinity attracts me, and as it is necessary to my task that I make a selection, I remain perplexed, and not without fear of being deluded like a man."

And the demon replied:

"Thou fearest vainly from morning to night! Nor is this thy only fault! Already in the presence of those joy-giving women, after having composed sweet

music upon the beauty of their naked hands, thou, grieving that thou canst not conduct them to thy house all at once, art angry and indignant against the fraud of prejudice and custom.

"Now in this doing thou hast humiliated thyself not only to recognize the power of the laws of others, but to be unthankful for the power of thy dream that alone is sacred. Why dost thou aspire to legitimate possession of the bodies when the ideal images in their triple grace already adorn the home of thy dream?

"Thou couldst not liberate the three beautiful captives from their prison without freeing them from the spell that transfigures them, for there is ever a mysterious correspondence that fluctuates between intense lives and those silent places where they wait and suffer. In this case their grace, their desolation, their pride draw from the occult virtues of infinite elements the fascination which attracts thee, much as lofty, long-rooted plants with a myriad fibres absorb from the inner bosom of the earth the immortal energies which by the impetuous rise of the stem into the clear air are exalted in the miracle of the corolla and the perfume.

"Canst thou, O poet, remember Egle Aretusa and Ipertusa banished from their garden? Star-clothed Heracles when he penetrated into that accidental

paradise to carry off the golden fruits by force, relinquished taking away with him the daughters of Night as even in his atrocious soul he felt he would have lessened and perhaps destroyed the paradisiacal mystery of their beauty."

"Oh, despot," I said to him then, "I think of him who has to come after I have disappeared!"

And the demon reasoned:

"Let such be always the apex of thy thoughts, but just now the necessity of choice presented itself before thee as a cruel trial, a cause of sorrow and of inevitable sacrifices, and thy heart felt pain at it. Consider that no Moira is more worthy than sorrow to be invoked to preside over a generation. Nothing in the world is lost, and unheard of things can sometimes be born of tears.

"Consider that the highest power of the will is not manifested in the readiness of choice between many offers, or in the firmness of resisting many impulses, but truly in the art of conferring efficacy, lucidity, and dignity of recognized and directed forces upon the indistinct movements of nature.

"Consider that there is always a method of being equal to the event, in the vicissitudes of the most uncertain life. There was once a man who, standing by the side of tyrant whose one word could have condemned him to death, held himself with such an air

and mien as to cause a doubt which of the two was true gentleman. Be thou like unto him, treating the event as an event, with royal understanding."

The dome of the sky was tinged with a hyacinthine pallor, whose calm the olive orchards received upon the leafy crests that concealed the sad attitudes of the black trunks. The fixed clouds around the summits of the rocks had not obtained the purple, but a vesture of more delicate color with which they languished, although some, raising a stately head above their companions, aspired to a crown of stars.

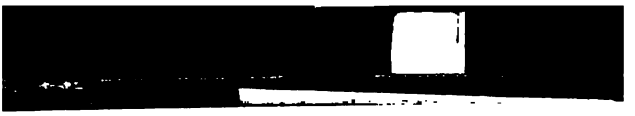
"Meanwhile thou canst compose thy harmonies," pursued the demon, "upon the marvelous generations of things that are born from the affinities and relations of three integral forms when thou contemplatest them purely. In their unions and relationships there is an extraordinary language that thou already understandest as if thou thyself hadst invented it.

"They give thee the joy of continuous creation and continuous discovery, and aid thee to complete thy union with a part of thyself unexpectedly revealed, they pour out upon thee the life that they received from thee in an immemorial time. Hadst thou not already enjoyed them before they smiled upon thee to-day? Standing in silence at their side, didst thou not feel thy soul full of doubt and gloom?"

"Oh, despot," I answered to him, conscious that

my nature turned with desire towards the garden from which I had withdrawn in the harmonious twilight, "oh, despot, it is true; standing in silence at their side, I experienced a voluptuousness stronger than if I had unloosed the tresses of their hair, or pressed my lips to the beautiful napes of their necks, and I am still full of it. But, the shadows having fallen, I would like to return there secretly, and, leaning invisibly on those virgin breasts, delay there long, because I think that those bosoms would breathe out for me, in the darkness, a great sweetness and a great sadness that I shall never know!"





III.

. . . . *" To sit with the fingers of the hands woven together, holding the tired knee within them."*

—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

"Where there is more sentiment there is martyrdom."

—LEONARDO DA VINCI.



AND then it was my turn to lead them under the flowers, where they listened with a visible agitation to the infinite melodies of the spring, bending or turning sometimes towards their own shadows that preceded or followed them, azure figures prostrated to kiss the ground. A confused joy of liberty and hope passed at times through their dazzled eyes, a word breathed without sound rose occasionally to their lips, and rendered them like the rims of brimming cups, and when the sisters paused for a moment I thought with inward infatuation of the overflow that suffocated them.

That which we said from time to time must have seemed useless even to them, but it had value in making us feel how deep a thing our true life was; a fugitive glance, a turn of the head, a brief pause, were enough to affect to the utmost depths those abysses where the light of common knowledge reached seldom and feebly, but our spoken words were as far from us as the undermost roots of the trees from the whisper of the heights.

Nothing could equal in singularity of beauty that

austerely blooming country; upon the ground, tawny and rough as a lion's mane, the rosy white bloom evoked thoughts of damsels tremblingly folded upon the vast shaggy breasts of legendary giants. The sun-rays created about the diaphanous petals that mobile splendor that precious stones have, and here and there in double lightning sparkled the pick-axes polished by the broken glebe.

We perceived how profound was our real life, and little by little with common accord, we ceased uttering those vain words that only broke the gravity of silence and dissipated the too dense cloud of dreams and thoughts.

As a divining atmosphere similar to that respired by mystics formed round about us, a more lucid communion connected us, and, without speaking, we exchanged some stupendous secret.

We were at times so impregnated by voluptuousness that our pupils exhaled a wave of it in a glance, and without contact, our slightest gestures transmitted as much of it as the slo[illegible]s might give, while the petals that fell [illegible]rom scarcely stirred branches relax[illegible] as if the trees were happy to [illegible] a confession of languor.

The v[illegible]udding, bent tow[illegible] the t[illegible] convulsed, excit[illegible]

with the example of a spasmodic force that was about to be converted into an intoxicating gift, and from the frail leaf and the slender vine-branch we became sensible of ideal power in the odoriferous oil of the almond, and the flame of oblivion extracted from the grape.

A sudden dizziness of desire seized me one day when I saw a drop of blood on Violante's hand, which was wounded by a thorn in the snowy whiteness of a hedge. Smiling, she drew back the beautiful, embellished hand, and as we chanced to be distant from the other sisters, and perhaps unseen, I experienced a wild desire to press my lips upon that blood and try the taste of it, and the violence with which I restrained myself made me tremble.

"Does the sight of blood frighten you?" she asked, in a voice that dissembling, rendered neither derisive nor secure.

And as her eyes gazed into mine, a sudden pallor seemed to cover me, as within me I experienced an indefinable sentiment like that which is confusedly produced when I imagine an immense wheel suddenly stopped while turning in precipitous revolutions. Something grand was upon the point of being resolved by both of us in that instant, and although we stood composedly, one in front of the other, our inward attitude was that of the tension which precedes

an irrecoverable leap. Our two lives stretched themselves out with all their forces.

Ah, how could I ever forget that ardent silence in which palpitated the invisible wing of a messenger who bore an unproffered word? What power of oblivion could ever cancel from my memory that hand impearled with blood, and those brambles heavy with flowers?

Anatolia's distant voice called us back, and we moved one beside the other suddenly invaded by a bodily languor and sadness as if we were just issued from a long night of pleasures.

But there were some instants also in which my soul inclined more towards her who called us, and towards her who was about to separate from her companions, and that alternation of love pleased me, for it did not dissipate my strength but stimulated it as the force of a breath excites the flicker of flames.

It seemed to me that I had found a new order of perceptions of which the strangest and the most diverse harmonized spontaneously in me, while some times from it a music so sweet and so beautiful was born that I felt to be upon the point of transfiguration, and that my desire to become a god was about to be accomplished.

At such moments I was wont to fancy, "If there ılly were a god of modern times who loved to sit

under flowering trees and coax the secluded hamadryads from their shelters behind the bark, that he might caress them upon his knees, he certainly could not experience greater joy than I do in gathering within myself the essential beauties of these delicious creatures, and mixing them with the same facility with which he might confound the submissive heads of his wood-nymphs in the composition of a harmony of houris."

Thus, at times, I believed to live in a myth formed by myself in the resemblance of those that the youth of the human soul produced under the skies of Hellas. The ancient spirit of deity, of divine nature wandered through the earth as when the daughter of Rhea made a gift to Triptolemus of her ears of corn to the end that he might sow them in the furrows, and that through him all men might enjoy the divine benefit. The immortal energies that circulate in things brought ever to mind the ancient transfiguration that for the joy of men had converted them into grand likenesses of beauty.

Like the Charities, the Gorgons, and the Moeræ, the virgins who accompanied me through that mysterious springtime were three, and I loved to imagine myself similar to that youth upon Ruvo's vase which bears a winged Genius at the threshold of a grove of myrtle. Over his head is written the name of Hap-

piness, and three virgins surround him, one bearing in her hands a plate loaded with fruit, another enwrapped in a bestarred mantle, and the third with the thread of Lachesis between her agile fingers.

One day we chanced to meet in a space of enclosed ground where the native husbandmen, perpetuating the religious custom of the heathen, had consecrated an oak struck by lightning.

"This is a beautiful death!" exclaimed Violante, leaning upon the fence made in the form of a parallelogram of snakes.

An almost terrible solemnity, not unlike what must have been the aspect of the axe that the Latin priests consecrated with the sacrifice of a biennial lamb, brooded over the solitary place.

"You are committing a sacrilege," I said to Violante. "No one can touch the sacred enclosure without profaning it, and Heaven punishes the guilty person with madness."

"With madness?" she echoed, moving away a little through a superstitious instinct, her act marking with unforeseen gravity my allusion to the pagan creed.

In a flash I recalled the swollen, bloodless countenance of the mad mother, the bewildered eyes of [illegible] I heard again that tragic cry:

"We breathe her madness!" And a chill sense of fatality ran through me.

"No, no," I said, involuntarily; "do not be afraid!" perhaps augmenting the spectre with that evident sign of sorrow for the hint that must have seemed a sad omen or a cruel presage.

"I am not afraid," she answered without smiling, and leaning anew upon the enclosure.

A great shadow was thus born from a vain word.

The lightning-blasted tree, black and stony as basalt, rose before us, showing its powerful trunk opened to the roots by a rending that summoned forth the terribleness of an avenging force, and while deprived of its branches upon the smitten side, it had preserved some of them at the top of the other side like contracted arms that raised towards the sun the implacable despair of their position. At each corner of the enclosure a ram's skull, whitened under numberless inclemencies of weather, was fastened by the crooked horns. All was immovable, dead, execrable, accursed, of primordial aspect.

From time to time the shrill cries of the hawks reached us from the high azure.

The days passed very rapidly, and were as days of farewell to her who was to separate from all of us.

"Look at the spring with all the intensity of your eyes," I said to her, "because you will never more see it again.

"Warm your hands in the sun," I advised her; "immerse them in the sun, those poor hands, because in a little while you will hold them crossed upon your breast, or hidden in the shadows under a brown woolen apron."

"Here is a miracle for which we must praise Heaven," I told her once, showing her a flower. "Consider the innumerable scriptures that the silvery tissue of this corolla contains, and the occult relation that exists between the number of petals and the number of stamens, and the thinness of the fibres that sustain the lobes of the anthers, and these diaphanous integuments, these reticles, these portions that open by themselves, these valves and these membranes, covered with an imperceptible down, which enclose the mysterious agitation of the pollen grains, —all the divine art that is revealed in the structure of this living corpuscle, endowed even in its frailness with infinite powers of loving and being fruitful.

"Consider the mobile network of shadows which the restless leaves make upon the ground, and that which the ray reflected from the trembling water casts upon the wall, the one azure, the other

cradle your melancholy; and the small

blond fingers that rise upon the tops of pine branches, and the drops of dew that hang from the beard of the oats, the slender, nervous system in the bees' wings, and the green, glittering eyes of the transitory horsefly, the irises that diversify the puffy throat of the wood pigeons, and the strange images that spring from the stains of the lichens, from the fissures of the trunks, from the distribution of the flint stones.

"Gather all of these marvels under the eyelids that will be lowered so long before the crucified Lord Jesus. In the old monastery of Queen Sancha, I think there are court-yards of stone, but no orchards."

"Why do you tempt me?" she asked piteously. "Does it please you to disturb my weak will? Are you perhaps sent by God to try me?"

"I do not wish to disturb your will," I answered, "but I dare to give you a brotherly counsel that you may suffer less. I think that when you are buried in that living grave, when you will no more be able to bring your cheek close to a grating without wounding yourself against the points, you, who have been raised in a garden, will have weeks of furious impatience, and all the visions of the open air will pass before your memory.

"Then you will know unthought-of torture because you cannot represent to yourself with exactness the

minute specklings of black and yellow that adorn the lizard's back, or the tender, downy leaf that sprouts from the branch of the apple-tree.

"I know the frenzy of this tardy curiosity. I once passionately loved a Scotch greyhound given to me by my father. It was a fine, magnificent animal of a nobility without equal, and when it died I was overcome with grief, and singularly tormented by the sorrow of not being able to represent in precise form the golden grains that shone in its brown eyes, and the gray marks that spotted its beautiful rosy palate, which I perceived occasionally in a bark or a yawn.

"We must always, then, gaze about us with attention, especially upon the creatures that we love most. Do you not love the things to which I called your attention, and are you not to abandon them, to place between them and you a sort of death?"

She was seated, with hands joined by clasped fingers, holding the weary knee within them, her delicate grace a little contracted by the uneasiness that the ambiguity of my speech, grave, futile, deceptive and sincere, gave to her, and speaking to her thus, I felt a pleasure analogous to that which I would have experienced in disordering the smooth bands of hair over whose near future the silvery scissors for the tonsure were suspended.

"*Tondeantur in rotundum.*"

I had still clear in my memory the freshness of the youthful smile that played upon her mouth in the last hour of that first day that filled me with wonder, and it pleased me to associate the likenesses of all of those small, many-colored things around the novice who, in that far-off February noon-tide, had revealed to me, as if it were a secret miracle, the night-flowering of her hawthorn.

I sought her, as we seek that happiness which is known to be fleeting, for she attracted me as some pure form of youth that might turn towards me tearfully smiling from the threshold of an obscure portal, where she was upon the point of entering and being swallowed up. I would have liked to say to her sisters, "Let me love her as long as she is of this world, that I may pour an aromatic upon her little feet!"

In my long visits, it often chanced to me to remain alone with her, and in some spiritual colloquy to be able to handle that ductile soul so solicitous to serve others.

From time to time Anatolia disappeared as one of the two gray-clothed women attendants would present herself, and beckon with a glance; for some days Violante hardly showed herself and seemed to avoid my company, considering me with indifference, and lapsing into her former state of lassitude. The two broth-

ers could not long endure the great light of the open sky, and thus it happened to me more than once to remain alone in the outer vestibule with the novice, upon the marble seat that was under the statue of summer, in the already verdant shade of the terraced stairway, or upon the banks of the arid fish-pond.

Once I said to her:

"Perhaps, dear sister, you have been deceived in the choice of your Bridegroom; when you hear the bishop announce '*Ecce sponsus venit*,' you will tremble to the core of your heart, believing that a beautiful, strong hand is to be extended towards you to gather you all like water into the hollow of his hand, as this is the sweet and imperious act that would be proper for your natural flexibility, dear sister.

"But perhaps you will be deceived at the very foot of the altar, and if you dare to raise your eyes, you will see the announced Bridegroom, among the immovable glow of the candles, with His hands pierced and His head girdled with thorns.

"It seems, dear sister, that it may be necessary to draw out the cruel irons which are deeply incrusted, and to complete such an act a terrible force is required. Then the sores must be healed with infinite patience and with balsams composed of herbs that can be plucked only upon certain giddy summits where the air is unbreathable, and the sores healed; the

blood that has overflowed must be infused in the veins, and the hard task finally accomplished; it sometimes happens that the healed hands suddenly withdraw. To few, indeed, of the brides of Jesus will it be conceded to see those hands truly revive, and even of those chosen, scarcely one, in some mystical evening, will have the supreme joy of feeling herself seized and held by the hand your vows tell about. . . . ."

"God grant that I may be that one!" murmured the submissive maiden.

"Ah, dear sister," I rejoined, "think what an immense force she must have in herself to revive a dead hand, and contract it so violently!"

"I have no strength, but I would pray to the Saviour for it."

"The Saviour can only give you the strength that you yourself have infused into Him, Massimilla."

"Hush, I beg of you," she implored, "I fear your words are impious."

"They are not impious, and you may listen to them. Have you not in memory the first strophe of the commentary of Santa Teresa? God is shown as a prisoner there, think what an immense power must have been exercised to enchain the Saviour! You can easily see, Sister Water, what brave acts are always demanded of the 'bride' extolled in the Anthems and

Responsories, and so, having a brotherly solicitude towards you, I wish at least to prepare your soul for the bitterness of the deception. Do not quiet yourself too much with the promises of the Psalms, although there is, without doubt, some magnificent, voluptuous security in the little verses that you have learned. 'Come, my Beloved!' because a king hath need of thy beauty; 'Come! the winter is past, the voice of the turtle is heard, the tender grapes give forth a good smell. . . . .' That Latin psalmist is truly incomparable in presenting the picture of love's intoxication overwhelmed with suffocating opulence. Certain verses seem to drop oils odoriferous as the hair of captives, or to have weight and sparkle like moulds of gold.

"When the bishop rests the crown of virginal excellence upon your head, your lips will pronounce some admirable words in which I feel and see mysterious importance and splendor. '*Et immensis monilibus ornavit me.*' Admirable words, are they not?"

She was looking at me now with so much passion that all her little soul trembled like a tear between her eyelashes, and, scarcely bending over, I could have quaffed it down.

"Perhaps I am doing you a little harm," I continued, "but I see in the depth of your eyes so ardent a dream that I fear for you, dear sister, as the life for

which you are preparing cannot conform to your dream and to your nature. A mediocre life awaits you, always the same, almost torpid, measured out by an unchangeable Order in that old monastery of Queen Sancha's that has already been a sepulchre for more than one Montaga and Cantelma. I have in memory a vision of the nuns on Ash Wednesday. When I was at Naples, the Anjou church of Santa Clara attracted me, not only because some of my elders repose there, or because one may there envy the Duke of Rodi who sleeps in the pagan sarcophagus of Protesilaus and Laodamia, but also because closing my eyes I could enjoy the poesy diffused from some beautiful name of a dead woman. There is Maria, Duchess of Durazzo and Empress of Constantinople; there is the Princess Clemenza, Isotta of Altamura, Isabella of Soleto, and Beatrice of Caserta, and that delicious Antonia Gaudino, whom you resemble, all sweetly sleeping in marble under the veil that Giovanni da Nola took away from the youngest of the Charities.

"As I said, I have a vision of the novices there on Ash Wednesday. Behind the main altar is a broad black grating, bristling with points, that encloses the ...sh choir, and through it may be seen the rows ... where the sisters are seated, while upon the ... of the grating a bishop, assisted by a Capu-

cin is seated, bearing a silver basin full of ashes in his hands.

"A small gateway being open the nuns, one by one, approach the aperture and kneel down, while the bishop, moving his arm backward and forward, marks the sign of the cross with ashes upon the foreheads, one after the other. Then the marked ones rise and return to their stalls like phantoms, slipping along the pavement with silent, cloth-shod feet.

"Everything is accomplished mutely, and is as frigid and unfeeling as the ashes. Ah, dear sister, when you, too, have received that chill, who will ever warm your little soul again?"

"Who warmed the soul of Santa Clara, and made it glow?" responded the novice, her cheeks coloring as she determined not to let the argument conquer her.

"A man," I answered, looking in her face; "Francis of Assisi. You can imagine Damianita upon her knees only at the feet of Francesco. A religious artificer represented her in the act of exchanging a kiss with the Seraphic one, and think of the long idyl that was woven between the hermitage of San Damiano and Porziuncula; think of the week of passion, of sorrow and of piety passed in the monastery garden, under the shade of the olive trees, in a summer of great thirst, when Clara drank the tears

shed from the almost blind eyes of Francesco; think finally of the colloquy between the two mystical lovers which preceded that supreme ecstasy whence the 'Canticle of Creatures' broke forth like a jet of light.

"You have beside you there the *Fioretti;* read over that chapter in which is narrated, 'How Santa Clara ate with San Francesco.' Never was nuptial banquet illuminated by more splendid torches of love, here is the description," and I read it to her:

"'The men of Assisi and Bettona, and those of the country round about, saw that Santa Maria of the Angels, and all the spot and the forest close by glowed fiercely, and it seemed that a great fire occupied the church, and the whole place and the forest altogether, so that the Assisians rushed down there in a great hurry to extinguish the blaze, believing truly that everything was burning, but arriving at the place and finding nothing in flames, they entered inside, and discovered San Francesco with Santa Clara.'

"You perceive, then, dear sister, in what manner the patroness of your Order defended herself from the frost of conventual life, although it must be admitted that the difference between the luminous hermitage of San Damiano and the seclusion of your Anjou monastery is great. Here there is no confla-

gration, but an equal, gray shade where humility becomes inert.

"Of what species is your humility, Massimilla? I imagine your wish for servitude to be very stately."

She was silent, discouraged and breathless, and was so sweet and so miserable in her bewilderment that I would have liked to take her upon my knees.

"When you appeared upon the terrace-way that first day," I went on in a lower tone, "you gave me at once the idea of an ermine. Now it seems that in our imagination the whiteness of the ermine cannot be disjoined from the pride of the purple, so much is it our habit to consider the one and the other united in robes of royalty. Do you not perhaps wear your mantle wrong side out, Massimilla, so that the purple is invisible underneath? Such might accord well with the manners of a Montaga."

"I do not know," she answered, perplexed; "whatever you say seems as if it must be so."

And it was as if she had confessed, "I will be what you wish me to be."

"If I were your bridegroom, Massimilla," I whispered, just to caress her little trembling soul, "I would give you a home where the daylight entered through thin slabs of honey-colored alabaster, or through panes storied with sibylline histories, and I would cause you to be attended by maids of honor

and silence-keepers, shod in felt and clothed in quiet-colored material, who would pass before you like great nocturnal butterflies, and certain apartments should have walls of crystal looking upon immense aquariums hidden by curtains that your hand could easily open, as many times as the desire came to you of letting your eyes travel in fancy through an oceanic valley full of strange, rich life, and around the house I would create for you a garden of trees that would lavish flowers and distil aromatic perfumes, and people it with graceful, gentle animals like gazelles, peacocks, swan and doves, and here in harmony with everything about you, you would live for me alone, while I, every day, after having satisfied my desire for superiority over men by some powerful act, would come here to breathe the air exalted by your silent love, I would come to live beside you the pure, profound life of my thoughts. Sometimes I would communicate to you a vehement fever, and sometimes I would make you weep an inexplicable weeping, and sometimes I would make you to die and to live again, that in your eyes I might be more than a man."

Did she prepare herself meanwhile for the separation, or did she delay it, awaiting with impatience that which for her was unexpected?

As I ascended one day, through the path of ancient box-wood trees where Violante had appeared to me under the great archway, the novice issued opposite, almost in the same place, smiling with a new smile upon her face.

"You have to-day the aspect of an angel who bears a good message," I said to her. "The spirit of April is all in you."

She extended her hand to me, which I took and held somewhat in my own.

"What have you, then, to announce to me?" I asked, reading in her eyes the newness that transfigured her.

Under my gaze she became confused, and again blushed a red that seemed violent in her pallor.

"Nothing," she answered.

"Yet," said I, "there is an announcement in your entire figure. You will communicate it to me without speaking, if you will permit me to walk at your side for some space. I have never felt your harmony and peace as at this moment, Massimilla."

She certainly believed that I spoke of love to her, so embarrassed was she, and her whole presence beamed with a spirit of gentleness so full of life, that I recalled those noble women whom young Dante's imagination brought together, from whose lips now

and then, "like water mixed with beautiful snow," words fell mingled with sighs.

And as I loved her inhumanly, some of the ancient words returned to my memory also. "For what motive dost thou love?"

"Tell us it, for surely the aim of such a love must be most novel."

We had left the centre path to penetrate into the grassy labyrinth; the bird hosts of the cloister were singing, the sparkling insects buzzed about, but my ear was attentive to the rustling her gown's hem produced, bending down the tops of the grown grass.

At last Massimilla confessed, with a timid voice:

"My departure has been deferred."

And then she added, as if to justify herself:

"I can thus celebrate the last Easter with my own."

But it suddenly seemed to me as if she had fallen between my arms, that her cheek adhered to my breast, and that to separate myself would make her bleed. Nevertheless, I exclaimed:

"That is good news!"

But I said nothing else, because my disquiet at the contact with that palpitating life was so excessive that it prevented any pitying dissimulation whatever.

She certainly expected words of love and joyousness from me, that I should take her hands and ask of her, "Will you renounce your vows forever, and be wholly mine?" This, I know that she awaited, and feeling her anguish so close to me, feeling her desire to give herself and to be happy, almost blown across my face like a flame, I was agitated by a quivering not unlike that of a man before whose eyes is suddenly displayed a great laceration which lays bare the inner tissues of living flesh. There was something of that horror in my suffering; up to that hour I had delighted in that dear soul as one does in insinuating the fingers in a soft, fine head of hair that to-morrow will be cut off. And behold this soul with all its trouble and sorrow adhered to mine.

"I could make of you a being of joy!" It was like a promise, it was almost a desire. Even in my last words the one and the other were transparent, and, in truth, inclining towards the dear soul, up to that time, my ear had received an indication of that occult vein from which the sudden beautiful s
had one day issued. Why, then, ought I t
such a sorrowful hope and renounce
power with that silent ado

We were alone in a st
felt the emptiness of
two figures if prese

and the anxiety that that absence produced in my spirit was as painful as the anguish of waiting.

Where were they? what were Anatolia and Violante doing in that hour? Were they also in the garden? I thought I saw them peering and moving aside at the turn of every path, and I imagined the expression of their first glance upon meeting us; I considered the singularity of behavior that both had maintained during these days, and sought to penetrate its true significance.

Benign, heroic Anatolia, whose pure eyes had an enticing dazzle like the waters of lakes whose unusual reflection reveals the existence of submerged treasures, appeared to me with her martyr-smile like one resigned to the extraction of the last drop of her heart's virtues, that she might soften incurable evils, while Violante, enclosed within her weariness and disdain, assumed an enigmatical attitude, half hostile, and infused me with a certain sense of calamity like that given by disastrous presentiments, for in my imaginings, she had ever behind her the shadow of her prophetic rocks, and the mystery of secluded rooms pregnant with deadly perfumes.

I would have liked to ask of her, who was beside me:

"Is there something changed in the voices of your beloved sisters when they speak to you, or when they

speak between themselves? Have they sometimes something that hurts you in their voice and in their glance? While you are one beside the other, breathing the same space, does there sometimes fall upon you a silence that suffocates you like that which precedes the hurricane? And do you then feel your tenderness suddenly dry up, and an asperity like venom swell up from its depths? And tell me, do your sisters weep separated from each other, or does it happen to you sometimes to weep together?"

Looking at my reserved companion, whom I would have liked to interrogate thus, I wished that I might experience love with her, for I saw that she enjoyed her suffering.

"You always carry a book," I said to her at last, to break the ambiguous spell, "after the manner of a prophetess."

Showing me the volume, she said, with that indefinable sound that reveals the moisture of tears in the voice:

"It is the book that I had the first day I met you."

"And the blade of grass?"

"It is burned."

"Let us put a red rose in it, then."

But she had such a humble grace in her commotion, and the inward ardor which enveloped her was

so ingeniously transparent, that I knew neither how to keep away from her, nor to refuse myself the sweetness of feeling her struggle, little by little.

"Let us sit down," said I, we will read some pages together. Does this spot please you?"

It was a little quiet, meadowy eminence, starred with anemones, and some pyramidal-formed yew trees gave it an almost cemetery-like appearance: in the centre, a caryatid, bent over so that her chest almost touched her knees, sustained the marble slab of a sun-dial, and here, as if near a table, stood two seats for a pair of lovers, who, gazing upon the shadow of the dial, wished to try the melancholy voluptuousness of a slow and conformable decay. Under the horary lines this sentence, cut into the marble, might yet be perceived:

"*Me Lvmen, vos vmbra regit.*"

"Let us sit here," I added, "it is a delicious place to enjoy the April sun, and to feel life flow through the veins."

A fearless green lizard, firm upon the quadrant, looked at us like a familiar being, with his little sparkling eyes. When we sat down he disappeared, and I then rested my hands upon the marble, which was very hot.

"It almost burns!" I exclaimed. "Feel."

Massimilla placed both of her hands upon it also,

and held them there, white upon white, the point of shadow tinging the extremity of the ring finger, while the cipher that indicated the hour was covered by the palm.

"You are designated by the sun-dial's hand as the hour of happiness," I murmured, because her graceful act pleased me profoundly, and because I loved her thus.

She half closed her eyes, and again her little soul trembled like a tear between her eyelashes, and I could have sucked it down scarcely bending over.

"The Saint," I added, touching the book, "has for you a divine verse in the surge of her prose, a supreme suavity, more gracious than those which Dante's mind germinated before exile. "'Live blessed and sorrowful.'"

She felt herself surrounded by light and love, as perhaps she had been in her deepest dreams, and from my words and my presence, and from her allusion and the open spring-time she drank an intoxication whose remembrance would perhaps fill her whole life.

She did not speak, but remained motionless in the attitude which I had praised, but I understood the ineffable things that the eloquent blood in the veins of her beautiful, naked hands told.

"Let me love her while she belongs to this world,"

I repeated mentally to her sisters, seeming to see their sad eyes shining through the leafage of the yew trees; "let me gather these anemones and pour them upon the head of hair that is soon to be shorn off!"

She remained almost happy, and her unconsciousness affected me the more because I loved her, and to myself I said:

"I love thee, but on condition that to-morrow thou diest. I give thee this flame provided that thou carriest it with thee to the sepulchre. Such is the necessity which crushes us!"

She roused herself, passed a hand over her face and murmured:

"This sun gives one a stupor!"

"Shall we go away from here?" I asked.

"No," she answered, with a feeble smile. "According to your advice, I ought to saturate myself with sunshine. We will stay here a little while longer. Read something, now."

She appeared weakened, as if scarcely recovered from a swoon.

"Read," she entreated, pushing the book towards me.

I took it, opened it, and turned the leaves here and there, reading over rapidly several lines. The transient shadow of a swallow passed over the page, and close by we heard the flutter of the wings.

"What a wonder it was for me," she subjoined. "That day you repeated to me the exhortation of Santa Caterina! I was so full of her spirit, and you spoke to me of her almost prophetically."

In the novice's voice I felt a confidence and abandon so sincere that she could no more openly have signified to me:

"Behold me, I am thine; I belong to thee entirely as no other living creature, and no other inanimate thing could belong to thee. I am thy slave and thy thing."

She absolutely seemed to possess an unnatural quality, to abolish for herself the law that prohibits perpetual favor and perfect possession to men in love. In that great sunlight she appeared to me transfigured in my imagination to a crystalline, fluid form, a liquid essence that I could absorb, and with which I could impregnate myself as with a perfume.

"I think," said I, "that reading this book sometimes, you must feel your soul evaporate like a drop upon red-hot iron. Is it not so?

"'Flame and abyss of charity, dissolve now the cloud of my body!' implores the saint; and you have marked those words on the margin; there is a constant aspiration to vanish, to evaporate in you."

Her white face smiled upon me almost trans-

parent against the whiteness of the marble in the sunshine.

"Here is another sign," I continued: "'Intoxicated soul, distressed and inflamed with love;' and still another: 'Be a tree of love grafted upon the tree of life.'

"What eloquence of passion this virgin has! She fascinates all of her silent sisters, because she speaks and cries out for them, but what renders the book precious to whoever loves life, is the abundance of blood that flows through it, boils in it, glistens within it continually, like an altar of sacrifice in the day of great immolations.

"This Domenican must have looked at the world only through a vermilion vision, she saw things through a veil of most glowing blood.

"'Memory is filled with blood,' she says. 'I will find the blood and the creatures, and in the blood I will drink their love and affection.' A sort of red dementia assailed her sometimes.

"'Drown yourself in blood,' she cries, 'bathe in blood, saturate yourself with blood, intoxicate yourself with blood, clothe yourself with blood, mourn in blood, make merry with blood, grow and strengthen yourself with blood!'

"She knows the worth of the sweet, terrible liquor, having seen it not only in the chalice, but bursting

forth from the veins of men; she who was seized by the whirlwind of life, who bore her nun's veil in the midst of the raging of the atrocious hatreds and violent passions wherewith her century is beautiful.

"Here is the marvelous letter to Brother Raimondo, of Capua; can you read it without trembling to the marrow? 'I held his head upon my breast, and I felt then the rejoicing of his blood and smelled its odor.'

"What I feel here is not only the ecstacy of the eucharist, but real voluptuousness, I can almost see the delicate nostrils of the young woman palpitate and dilate; and this phrase of hers, too, I admire: 'To be armed with one's own sensuality.'

"She must have had acute senses, for her writing swarms with living images, wonderful in coloring and movement, almost Dantesque in vigor and audacity

"Ah, dear sister, this is not a guide to conduct you in peace to the portal of your cloister! In the garment of this cloaked woman you realize not only the odor of blood, but all the scents of superb life through which, untamed, she has passed.

"An innumerable multitude, clad in camlet and purple, with iron and with gold, enveloped her like a whirlwind with a 'fire of wrath and of hatred,' that is not less fervid than the flame of love.

"Friars, monks, hermits, women of pleasure, leaders, princes, cardinals, queens, pontiffs—all the tem-

pers of a cruel and magnificent century she treated with her indefatigable will. She is powerful both in contemplation and action.

"She calls Alberico da Balbiano 'dearest brother,' the Cavaliers of the Company of Saint George 'dearest sons;' to the Queen Giovanna of Naples she dared to write, 'Alas, one can weep over you as if you were dead!' To Gregory XI., 'Be a brave man and not timorous,' and to the King of France she says, 'I wish it.'

"For that, Massimilla, I prefer her, and also because she possessed a Garden, a House, and a Cell of Self-knowledge; because, also, that this was her motto; 'to taste and eat souls,' and finally she wrote, even before Vinci did, 'The intellect nourishes affection; who knows most loves most, and loving more tastes more.'

"A lofty sentiment, that ought to be the inner rule of every beautiful life."

While speaking I followed in Massimilla's open, fixed eyes the slow rhythm of a wave that appeared to have a certain musical correspondence with the sound of my voice, and so new and strange was that sensation for me that I prolonged my speech for fear of interrupting it.

I had scarcely ceased, in fact, when she bent her forehead, and in silence two great tears overflowed

from her limpid eyes and trickled down her cheeks.

I did not ask anything, because she was weeping, but I took in mine own those hands that were like sweet leaves burnt by the noontide, and under that summery sky of April, near the dazzling marble upon which the shadow of the dial-hand seemed immobile for an indefinite time, and among those funeral yew trees and coronal anemones, I had a few moments of inexpressible exultance.

I *saw* a spirit that was not mine own, suddenly reach, and maintain itself there for some instants, that part of life, beyond which, according to the speech of Dante, one who designs to return can penetrate no further.

And for that spirit afterwards, it seemed to me that the rest of love and life should have no worth.

From that time on the joy-giver retook for me the semblance she had had that first day, seated between her two brothers like an image of Prayer. Having raised the veil to gaze into the depths of her eyes, I had beheld a rapid miracle accomplished under my investigation. I still preserved within me something of its dazzlement, but the veil had fallen again, and forever. Once more she seemed to me separated from this century.

So that when Oddo related to me one day a pitiful story of a wedding prevented by death, I listened to it as one listens to a legend of remote times, realizing then how true and deep was my alienation.

She had been loved and asked in marriage by Simonetto Belprato two years before, and, like *Ifanea*, had lost her betrothed almost upon the eve of matrimony.

. . . . "Her wedding day already near,
The happy garlands were made ready, and they were laid away."

Oddo brought back to memory the pale remembrance of Simonetto, and represented to me the mild, youthful figure of the student, the last heir of a noble family of Trigento, who had retired into the province to be near his widowed mother, to collect herbs, and finally to die.

"Poor Simonetto!" said Oddo, regretting him with brotherly soul. "I can see him still in his herbalist's toggery, with his tin tube suspended from his shoulders, his crooked cane, and his portfolio of green morocco. He spent all of his days gathering herbs, or preparing and dissecting the gathered plants. He had filled his house full of herbariums, and upon the cases he could well put his flowering crest as emblem. You know the Belprato use for their coat-of-arms, a field divided in straight line by a band of gold, with the upper space red with a silver lily, and that

below green, sown with red flowers with leaves of gold.

"Wasn't this union singular, Claudio?" he continued. "The last Belprato an herb-gatherer! I predicted to Massimilla, just for a joke: 'you will finish between two leaves of gray paper.' They were betrothed in the garden, collecting herbs, and seemed made one for the other. We, too, were content, because Massimilla would not be far distant from here, and would have entered into a good family. (The Belprato are, as you know, of ancient nobility, though decayed in the last centuries. They came from Spain in the reign of Alphonse of Arragon.)

"Everything was ready for the wedding. I remember well the day on which the nuptial robe with the garland of orange-flowers arrived from Naples, a magnificent gift from our aunt Sabrano. Massimilla tried it on; she was delicious in it, and Antonello and I wanted Anatolia and Violante to try it, too, for good luck,—poor, adored creatures!

"The garland, I remember, became entangled in Violante's hair in such a strange manner that it was impossible to take it away without wrenching out some hair that remained among the flowers. One of the servants murmured that it was a bad omen. She did not tell a falsehood. Simonetto, in fact, was to become the victim of his mania.

"It was autumn, and he often repaired to Linturno to gather the aquatic plants in the stagnant stream, and there, and nowhere else, he took the germs of the pernicious fever that destroyed him in two days. We had a funeral instead of a bridal; we are fortunate always, you see."

We were talking in Antonello's rooms, which the lowered curtains rendered sombre as the day outside grew cloudy. I could not see the sky through the windows, yet I had the somewhat enervating sensation of external tepidity, and I was certain that outside some drops of rain had commenced to fall, those warm tears that are so sweet when they touch the face or the hands.

Antonello was stretched out motionless upon the bed without speaking. From time to time the chatter of a swallow might be heard.

"Was it perhaps because of that that Massimilla enters a monastery?" I asked Oddo.

"I don't know; I don't think so," he replied. "A long time has already passed, but, of course, life in this house must be more tiresome for her than for the others. I always think that she believes herself dried up and extinct, as the plants of the herbariums Simonetto left her as legacy.

"That nuptial garment closed away in a wardrobe like a relic—can you imagine it? That white husk

that now must have taken the odor of the withered plants—think of it! Does it seem to you that in all the world death can have a sadder museum than that of which Massimilla is the keeper.

"I am unjust sometimes, and I cannot always hide the bitterness that ascends from my heart when I think that Massimilla abandons us, is going away.

"It seems as if final dissolution must follow upon her departure, as if a whirlwind must dissipate and scatter us all like a heap of rags. Meanwhile, she seeks to save herself.

"But I am unjust; she is truly, perhaps, the most unhappy here. What I said laughingly has become reality for her; she believes she is like the flowers and leaves of the herbariums. To revive, to have again an illusion of life, she forces herself in communion with living things.

"Have you not seen how she sinks her hands deep in the verdure and keeps them there to feel the caterpillars glide over the flesh? Do you know that she passes hours and hours in the garden, searching out the small animals and insects and making friends of them?

"In this, she is, as you said, an example of Francescan perfection: but what would you say if you knew that it was only an anguished desire to feel

life? I have understood it, I alone, perhaps, have understood—"

He uttered the last words in a low voice, almost as if he said them to himself, and then he was silent, perhaps considering within himself the creature of his disturbed imagination.

Was this a sickly dream of his, or did the living Massimilla respond in reality to the forsaken custodian of dead plants? I did not prolong the doubt within myself, but I wished to enjoy all the poesy that the strange images diffused in the shadow of the room where the faint patter of the rain reached, awakening in my nostrils the need of breathing the smell of wet earth. I arose and opened the nearest pane a little, and the earthy odor entered.

"In the first months after Simonetto's death," Oddo went on to say, "she took a great deal of care of the herbariums, passing long hours in the room where they were placed, examining leaves and reading the labels and I often kept her company, she distressed me so much.

"One day, I recollect, I surprised her while she was opening the wardrobe where she preserves her wedding gown, in the same room with the herbariums. Another day in spring, I remember, she was very much affected because a narcissus bulb had sprouted—isn't it strange, Claudio? And again, last

spring, I saw that bulb renew itself. This year I have not asked Massimilla about it; shall we go and see?"

He rose upon his feet as if seized with a feverish impatience, and took some steps towards the door, but Antonello, who was still stretched out upon the sheets, raised up also with the same aspect (ever vivid in my memory) with which he had announced the lugubrious passage of the sedan-chair, and placing his forefinger upon his mouth in token of silence, he bent towards the wall looking upon the gallery, and stood listening. In the silence only the sweet, uniform sound of the tepid spring rainfall was heard upon the solitary garden.

"Don't go out!" whispered Antonello.

We did not ask why, so evident was the cause of that fear upon his emaciated, contracted countenance, and as a sound of voices and of footsteps reached us, Oddo drew near to the door and opened it a little to look through. I, too, approached, and, standing behind his back, perceived Anatolia through the chink, who, followed by one of the two gray women, conducted her mother upon her arm through the long, covered gallery.

The Princess Aldoina, [illegible] with fatigue, leaning [illegible] weight.

She was strangely dressed in pompous, trailing garments, ornamented with false jewels, and carried her head high and inclined a little backward, while her eyes were half shut and an indescribable wandering smile played upon her withered lips, as if the murmur of the rain upon the court-yard pavement were for her a whisper of homage in the midst of which she passed, a queen going towards her throne, and a great light of sorrowful pity illumined the filial countenance that bent towards the crazy woman.

As the apparition faded away we remained in affectionate anxiety for some instants, and while I yet heard the sound of the sad footsteps, I saw within me, with extraordinary evidence, the likeness of the virgin, animated by pity and sorrow, who had appeared to me in her true and supreme light. From my inner consciousness a sentiment almost as religious as before a sacred mystery, arose, for none of the pure consoler's previous acts that my presence had witnessed, had the worth and the signification of that which she had unconsciously perfected under my hidden gaze.

She at once attained to a sublime attitude in my soul, irradiated by all the splendor of her moral beauty, exalted by all the force of her heroic will.

Contemplated thus, in the secret of her own life to which I was a stranger, in the absolute sincerity of her sentiment, outside of every affinity with myself,

she assumed an ideal form that in my mind she enjoyed in common with the intrepid creations made immortal by the poets, divine victims of voluntary sacrifice.

Antigone, leading her old blind father by the hand, or prostrated to cover again her brother's skeleton with dust, was not stronger nor more tender than she, and had not a face more pure nor a larger heart.

In that condition of languid tedium, in that enervating gloom where a sick man's malady grew deeper, while a restless voice evoked the image of a vain torture among a defunct flora, the consoler, appearing, gave an elevation of life at once to my spirit, and like a sudden light, which striking the gloomy wall made the immovable sword in the sculptured arms glitter, she drew great lustre from my hidden desire.

In her there was a virtue that could have produced prodigious fruit; her substance could have nourished a superhuman germ; she, in truth, was the "nourisher," the "nurse," such as virgin Antigone appeared to blind Œdipus, exiled and wandering. An immense multitude of greedy creatures could have drunk of her tenderness without exhausting it.

Did not she, like the ancient heroine, preserve in herself alone, in her great heart that genial flame that the hearth side of her dying race lacked? Was she not uniquely the soul of that sad house?

Massimilla in her arid orchard, Violante in her cloud of perfumes paled before their sister, who walked with so firm a step and so sweet a smile in the path of sacrifice.

And I thought of Him, the new life that must come.

Prince Luzio and I were seated near an open balcony one afternoon hour, when the too ardent warmth of that dying May had begun to moderate itself, and the pilgrim clouds stamped a vast blue shade upon the heated valley.

As the anniversary of the death of King Ferdinand recurred, the faithful prince, to commemorate his mourning, summoned forth in my mind all the sadness and horrors of the long, royal agony, and there, above the perfumes that ascended from the walled garden, the sorrowful phantoms awakened by the aged voice, succeeded each other without intermission; the silent journey over the heights of Ariano and in the intrenchment of Bovino among whirlwinds of snow, the baleful omens that rose up at every step, the first evident signs of evil on a frozen night when the benumbed King limped over the ice, that aggravated the difficulties of the declivity; his eager desire to continue on the road without delays, as if inexorable destiny pursued him, the frightful pallor

which suddenly spread over him in the presence of the throng and among the utmost honors that he could have foreshadowed; the cries which the spasm of excessive pain wrenched from him, and which drowned the clamor of the nuptial feast; the confusion of the doctors assembled around his bed, hesitating under the hostile, suspicious glance of the Queen; his burst of tears at the first entrance of the fresh, youthful Duchess of Calabria in the chamber, already infected with the exhalations of the contagion, where he was lying, aged and broken by suffering; then his tragic farewell to his own statue as the nurses turned him towards it while transferring him to another room, and the embarkation upon the vessel,—a ceremony as sad as a burial,—and his dismal jest as the litter was carried down through hatches which were widened by cutlass blows; then the arrival at Caserta, the rapid aggravation of the melody, the putrid dissolution of his body in the great bed surrounded by sacred images, miraculous relics, crucifixes, lamps, and candles; finally the pomp of the viaticum, the unrecognizable King rising up upon his pillows to the terror of the attendants; the last words, the Christian serenity of death, the dispute between the Queen and the doctors over the embalming of the body, the aid of the soldiers employed about the bier to continually cleanse the

putrid sores—all the sadness and the horror passed through our memories, and I, listening, thought of the Duke of Calabria sobbing in a corner like a woman.

"What a beautiful, terrible dream," I reflected, "the odors of the dead should have been able to feed in that youth through those troublesome spring weeks! In what superb, intoxicating meditations my soul would have sunk under the shade of those vast trees, and how the constrained, impetuous agitation of the powerful trunks would have seemed infinitesimal to me confronted with my own!"

Prince Luzio narrated how one day the Duke of Calabria entered his sick father's apartments, terrified and out of breath, to announce the expulsion of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and with what violence of words the King had judged his relative.

"Ah, if Ferdinand were not dead!" exclaimed the old man, with almost menacing gesture. "A few hours before expiring, he said, 'The crown of Italy has been offered to me.' Do you not think, Claudio, that it would rest upon a Bourbon's head to-day?"

"Perhaps," I answered, with great respect; "and if it were so, the Prince of Castromitrano ought to be exalted to the first honors of the kingdom. Let me tell you how much I admire your dignity and your faith. You are of the very few, among our equals,

who have maintained, intense and intact, the sentiment of the virtue of lineage. Rather than renounce the privilege, and assume an attitude unbecoming to your legitimate pride, rather than appear the survivor of yourself, you have retired from the world, but after having dazzled it with a supreme splendor of magnificence, you have come to await in solitude the event that Destiny reserves for your house. Misfortune has treated you kindly, as there is still the privilege of sorrow, and yours is well recognized."

The paternal countenance of the prince became grave and attentive. The veneration that his beautiful white hairs inspired in my soul was much deeper than my words manifested, but there was a tenderness of so pure a quality united to that reverence, that it could only have been given to me by a female presence. I felt, in fact, the spirit of Anatolia. Appearing at the threshold of the door that opened in the distance of the room, she had passed down the length of the apartment in silence, and white, mysterious and gracious as a familiar Genius, was seated in the shadow of a corner.

"Far away from the world," I continued, "enwrapped in a dense cloud of melancholy, you have up to this time been able to nourish the hope of a resurrection of things that are dead, and my ears are still ringing with the prophecy of your faith. Assuredly

the things that are dead will rise again transformed, and if you will step up for a moment to the spectacle that the world offers to-day, you will feel your long-cherished dream fall from your soul like a shriveled leaf; the recovery of his little State, and even the acquisition of Italy by Francesco, of Bourbon, will appear useless to you, for be it a Bourbon or a Savoyard who is upon the throne, the King is always absent. One cannot call the man a king, who, submitting himself to the will of the people, in accepting a well-determined but hampered duty, humiliates himself to fulfill it with the diligence and modesty of a public scribe, whom the fear of being dismissed, stimulates without respite.

"Do I not speak the truth? Francesco himself would not know how to reign differently. Did not he, soon after his father's death, write with his own hand an edict to re-establish the results of the abolished constitution, and was not Alessandro Nunziante he who impeded it from being promulgated? Recall to your memory the lamentable proclamation of December 8, given from the soldiers' prison of Gaeta. Is that the language of a king, a vanquished king?"

Prince Luzio listened in silence with contracted eyebrows, and as I paused he remarked, not without a shade of severity in his tone:

"It may be seen that the blood of Gian Paolo Cantelmo is in you."

"The blood of all of my ancestors is in me," I responded. "Ah, dear father—let me give you that name—I know well how sorrowful it is to you to renounce a dream of justice before which the flame of your faith has been lighted for so many years, but I want to tell you that for us and for our equals there is safety and salvation only upon the substitution of energetic purpose to useless hope.

"Allow me to speak to you without circumlocution; it is futile to hope that some heroic impetus will unexpectedly animate the stagnant blood of San Luigi. I have recently visited the exile; he is full of a placid resignation, given to beneficence and prayer, and mindful of his brief reign as of a far-off, painful dream.

"Your prophecy would draw a mild, incredulous smile from his lips, nothing more. If his spirit migrates sometimes towards the Gulf, his goal is not Capodimonte, but the summit of the Camaldoli. He is accustomed to a modest, pious life, and no longer sees his crown sparkling during his night-times. Let us leave him placidly sleeping!"

The faithful prince had bowed his head upon his breast, and in his bent forehead I saw the lines deepen like furrows full of thought.

"Not only for him is fate opaque," I went on; "the twilight of kings is ash-colored, and blind to every glory. Give a glance beyond the Latin countries; in the shade of borrowed thrones you will see false monarchs fulfill their public functions with exactness, like automatoms, or attend to the cultivation of their childish manias, and their mediocre vices.

"The most powerful, the ruler of a vast populace, his herculean muscles corroded by the worm of suspicion, is pining away alone in taciturn misanthropy, not even having the zest of opposing some magnificent havoc with swords, to the little chemical formulas by which his rebels irrigate and manure their sterile provinces.

"There is, however, a truly regal soul, which you have perhaps been able to consider close by, that of the family of Maria Sofia. That Wittelsbach attracts me by the immensity of his pride and of his melancholy; his efforts to conform his life to his dream have a desperate violence. Any human contact whatever makes him shudder with disgust and rage, any ioy seems to him vile that he himself has not imagined.

"Exempt from every poison of love, hostile to all intrusions, he has for many years communicated only with the refulgent heroes that a creator of beauty gave him as companions in supernatural regions.

"In the deepest musical streams he quenches his anxious thirst for the divine, and then ascends to his solitary dwelling-places where, over the mystery of the mountains and the lakes his spirit creates the inviolable kingdom over which alone he wishes to reign.

"Because of this infinite sentiment of solitude, this faculty of being able to breathe upon the highest and most deserted summits, this consciousness of being unique and intangible in his life, Louis of Bavaria is truly a king, a king of himself and of his dream; he is incapable of imprinting his will upon the multitude, and of bending them under the yoke of his idea; he is incapable of reducing his inner power to acts; he appears childish and sublime at the same time.

"When his Bavarians were battling with the Prussians, he was far indeed from the field of battle, hidden in one of his little lake islands, where he forgot shame and disgrace under one of those ridiculous disguises that he used to favor his beautiful illusions.

"Ah, rather than interpose a shelter between his majesty and his ministers, it would be better for him to finally undertake that marvelous nocturnal empire sung by his Poet. It is incredible that he be not already departed from this world, dragged away by the soaring of his vain fancies."

The prince still held his forehead bowed, in so grave an attitude that, even in the impetuosity of speech, I felt my heart concerned with the fear of having grieved him, and a filial anxiety swept over me to console him, to lift up his beautiful white head, and to see his eyes shine with unaccustomed joy.

Anatolia's presence communicated a generous fervor to me, almost a necessity, indeed, to reveal what was strongest and most superb within me. She was quiet and silent as a statue in the shadow, but her nearness irradiated my soul like a volume of light.

"You see, dear father," I went on to say, unable to restrain the palpitations that reverberated in my voice, "you see old, legitimate royalty declining everywhere, and that the multitude, the masses stand ready to engulf it in their slimy abysses. A destiny other than this is, however, scarcely merited, and not only royalty alone, but all things grand, noble, beautiful, all sovereign ideality that were once the glory of pugnacious, domineering man are all upon the point of disappearing in the immense putrefaction that heaves, and raises up and swells.

"I will not tell you to what point the ignominy has reached, because I should use words that would offend your ear, and afterwards we would have to purify the air with some grains of incense. I de-

parted from the city suffocated by disgust, but now I think of the dissolution almost with rejoicing.

"When all will have been profaned, all the altars of Thought and Beauty beaten down, and every urn of ideal essences shattered; when common life will have descended to such a limit of degradation that it seems impossible to surpass it, and when the last inflated desperado shall go out like a lamp in the great obscurity, then the multitude, seized by a panic more tremendous than has ever shaken their miserable souls, will pause, and lacking all at once the frenzy that blinded their judgment, will feel themselves lost in a wilderness encumbered with ruins, seeing before them neither pathway nor light.

"Then upon this multitude will descend the necessity for Heroes, and they will invoke the rods of iron, the cruel sceptres that will discipline them anew. Dear father, I believe that these Heroes, these new Kings of the earth, must come forth from our race, and that even from to-day all of our energies should concur in preparing for the event, near or far off. This is my faith."

The prince had raised his head, and was looking at me with eyes intent and somewhat astonished, almost as if I appeared to him in an unheard of aspect, but an unusual vivacity, that reanimated all of his person, told me that he was already touched by my ardor.

"I have lived some years in Rome," I continued with surer confidence, "in that third Rome that ought to represent 'Uncontrolled Love of the Latin blood for the Latin country,' and to radiate from its summits the wonderful light of a new Ideal. I have been a witness of the most ignominious violations and of the most obscene unions that have ever dishonored a sacred spot, and I have understood the lofty symbol that is concealed in the act of that Asiatic conqueror who cast five myriad human heads into the foundations of Samarcand, wishing to establish it as a capital.

"Do you not believe that the wise tyrant wished to signify the necessity for premature slaughter at the precise point of constituting a new order of things? Into the foundations of the third Rome, the men called liberators must be sacrificed and thrown, and following the ancient funeral custom, the things that they loved and with which they were the most familiar, must be placed at their feet and sides, and within their 'delivering' hands, and the heaviest masses of granite rooted out and dragged from the mountain tops to enclose eternally the deep tombs.

"But more tenacious, more pestiferous lives have never been seen upon earth! In the first place, then, dear father, I learned this in Rome: The fleet of the

Thousand weighed anchor from Quarto, only to obtain from the State the protection of the art of cheating. Nevertheless, amid the brawling of the traders, I have understood that mysterious, remote voice that persisted in echoing from every pebble like the reverberation in a sea-shell, and I have consoled every disgust with the sublime spectacle of the Agro.

"Ah, Father, so long as Rome is under the sky, who can ever despair of the destinies of the world? When I think of her adoringly, I see her only in the act in which she was represented upon the medallion of Nerva, with the helm within her hands; when I think of her and adore her, I only know how to specify her virtue with the speech of Dante, 'In every generation of things, that is most excellent which above all is One.' And his principle of unity should still be, as it has already been, collector, director, and preserver of all that is good and capable of order in the world.

"The Dantesque similitudes of the fields and the flames are well suited to her, this queenly city, if one is able to conceive the former as composing a single base, and the latter as reunited in one and the same apex, I firmly believe that the greatest amount of future dominion will be precisely that which will ve its base and its apex in Rome, for I, a Latin,

glory in having placed as the precept of my faith the mystical truth declared by the poet, 'There is no doubt that Nature may have prepared a spot in the world adapted to universal empire, and this is Rome.' Now, by what mysterious competition of blood, by what vast experience of culture, in what propitious harmony of circumstances will arise the new King of Rome?"

The sweet fever that had heated my meditations almost to delirium in the Latium desert rekindled itself in my veins, the great phantoms already evolved from the sacred soil again tumultuously occupied my spirit, and all the hopes that my impetuous pride, mindful of the most bloody of human tragedies, had engendered upon that solitude, rose up in confusion and became agitated, giving me an anxiety that I could scarcely sustain.

The aspect of the venerable old man assumed a most grave solemnity for me; I considered him in that hour the trustee of the virtue that was disclosed to the light of glory in magnificent forms upon the trunk of his family tree, and to him, already nearing the sepulchre, and rendered seer by sorrow, I was about to demonstrate as to a judge the rights of my ambitious dream, to ask good presage and guidance as of a soothsayer, and to propose as to my equal in age the alliance which was necessary to me.

The mute presence of the virgin in the shadow augmented my anxiety, for she, in truth, seemed destined to me to become through love "Her who propagates and perpetuates the ideality of a race favored by heaven."

I did not dare turn towards her, so sacred at that moment seemed the mystery of her virginity, but the indistinct image of occult treasures, roused sometimes by the extraordinary light discerned in the depths of her transparent eyes, became defined in me, and even without turning, I felt a species of cheerful fortune palpitate in that border land of shadow, a living figure charged with inestimable worth, a something, I know not what, of the infinitely august and hidden, like the divine substances guarded under cover, within the inmost recesses of temples.

"Like me, you are convinced," I added, "that every excellence of human type may be the effect of an initial virtue, that, through innumerable degrees, choice after choice reaches its supreme intensity, and is manifested latterly in the progeny, with the assistance of temporary unions.

"The value of Blood is extolled not only by our patrician pride, but is also recognized by the severest doctrine: the highest example of conscience can appear only at the climax of a race that in the course of time has elevated itself through a continuous ac-

cumulation of forces and of works: at the zenith of a lineage in which the most beautiful dreams, the most valiant sentiments, the most noble thoughts, the most imperious pleasure, may be born and preserved through a long order of centuries.

"Consider now a people of most distant royal origin, flourishing under the Latin sun, in a happy land lined with the streamlets of a new poesy. Transplanted in Italy, they became strengthed with such an exuberance that in a short time nothing else could sustain comparison with them.

"'Sad is that disciple who does not outstrip his master,' Vinci determined, and that people seem to have placed at the beginning of their grandeur a a sentence still more arduous, 'Sad is the son who does not outstrip his father.'

"By a concordant and uninterrupted effort, from birth to birth, this family elevated itself towards the superior objects and visions of life. In times of blind wrath, in which reason confided itself only to arms, these people already seemed to understand that 'men who have vigor of intellect above others, are by nature the masters of others,' while from the beginning their discipline had an intellectual character, and seemed to be dictated by Dante.

"It consisted in reducing all possible power of the intellect to acts, in first speculating, and afterwards

operating through their speculations; in the gravest duties as well as upon the most bloody fields, or at most generous feasts they were everywhere pre-eminent, equally excellent in commanding hosts, in governing states, in conducting embassies, in protecting alike master minds and mechanics, in erecting palaces and churches.

"This family has mingled with all the diverse forms of the life of Italy, it has plunged into every fresh fountain of culture; to live meant for it to become firm and continually to grow, to struggle continually and conquer, to live signified to predominate, to rule.

"There was no respite to the formidable instinct that agitated the members of this race, a steady, confident intention directed their enduring impetuosity, and ever—like those prudent archers whom Machiavelli gives as an example—they aimed higher than the destined mark.

"So famous were their deeds that the greatest poets have perpetuated the fame of them, and writers of history have compared them to those of ancient commanders, and held them up as models for those of the future. It would seem, however, that their virtue has not yet been entirely manifested, that they have not yet attained the insuperable
t, and that to-morrow, or within a century, or

indefinite time their accumulated energies ought to expand into a supreme apparition."

"*Cave adsum!*" interrupted the prince with a stately smile; "is not this perhaps the undertaking of your kindred?"

"It could well also bear the emblem of the Montagas," I answered readily—"*Sub se omnia.*"

The prince bowed with a movement that showed by itself that my reply was not a simple courtesy, but well suited to the dignity of his great name. He now appeared like the memory of him which had remained with me from childhood, a most beautiful example of superior humanity, manifesting in every act the sentiment of his absolute separation from the multitude, from common duties, from common virtues, and it seemed to me that he might have been able to shake from his soul the weight of misfortune that enfeebled him, and rise up in all his robust manhood, almost assuming the marvelous qualities of his hands, those hands as pure and beautiful, as if rendered unchangeable by some balm, surviving administrators of a liberality comparable to the ancient, "who for small services loved to recompense grandly."

The last hour of light was fading out, and from the kindled heavens the annunciation of summer descended upon the family garden, where, among the

stern odors of the centenarian boxwood-trees, the statues,—pallid and watchful as memories in a faithful soul,—conjured up by their attitudes the phantoms of abolished grandeur, while beyond the mansion the immense crown of rocks fashioned by primordial fire unclosed itself, so lofty and rugged that each of its points seemed worthy to sustain a chained Prometheus.

I had seen those points flame against the sky with an incredible light like carbuncles the first evening of my arrival, and the highest, flame-tipped above the universal gloom, most acutely wounding the sky, like the cry of passion without hope.

Then in that past twilight I was alone, the three princesses at a distance in their walled garden, and my fate yet a stranger to theirs, but here, in a similar union of things, I was about to effect the destiny foretold in that first agitation of my desire.

Had I, then, emerged from every perplexity? Of the three beautiful ones, whom in that distant evening I had thought to perceive in the act of receiving my spring gift in their outstretched arms, was one at last chosen by me for the necessary alliance? And would I then utter her name in her father's presence? A new disturbance invaded me, and Anatolia seemed no longer alone in the shadow, but the sisters had silently seated themselves near her,

and I thought that their eyes were intently fixed upon me.

As I turned, I discerned the motionless, white figure in the shade, and every other image was dispersed and every vain uneasiness fell from me.

She was the living symbol of security, the Watchful and the Protecting. With her strength and her patience, with the light of her own smile, she had known how to convert sorrow into an adamantine armor that rendered her invincible. She was made to guard, to keep, to preserve, to nourish and defend until death that which was committed to her trust. And I saw her again in fancy, her pure brow radiant with divination, watching over the son of my blood and of my soul.

Then from the very roots of my being, where sleeps the indestructible virtue of ancestors, arose and went towards the chosen one the desire to create that One, in whom should be transmitted all the ideal magnificence of my people, my own conquests, and the maternal perfections; the original sentiment of dependence that bound my actual being to the most remote ancestors became most profound in me then. Like the tree-top that condenses in itself the entire life of the branchy trunk down to the extreme roots, I felt the whole lineage revive within me. I felt that death had destroyed only the cor-

poreal species, the transitory forms of the generations, and the fullness and vehemence of that life almost abolished the limits of my natural power.

"You have recognized in me before, and not without a shadow of severity, the descendant of Gian Paolo Cantelmo," I said to the prince, smiling.

"I must confess that the examples of disobedience and rebellion against the King are not rare in my house. But there is the red Lion that justified them, and you certainly are not ignorant of the commissions that the Cantelmi had from Charles II. of England. Of most ancient royal blood, they have never been able to resign easily themselves to consider the King other than an equal, and indeed it would rather seem as if they never combatted other adversary with such ardor as they fight the King, and if Gian Paolo disturbed Ferdinand of Aragon's slumbers and humiliated Alfonso, Giacomo I., and Menappo overthrew Manfredi in Benevento, Giacomo VIII. waged war prosperously against Ladislaus by the side of Braccio da Montone and the Sforza, and Antonio opposed himself to Renato of Anjou.

"In each Cantelmo there is an original tendency to communicate with himself alone, to separate himself, to decide well upon his own person and his own power, as if each founded the conception of his dignity upon a firm conviction 'that the one being

is the root of the able being, and that that which is able is such because it exists in one.'

"In this I recognize with joy one of the essential marks of the future dominator that is to come, of the monarch, of the despot, but there is also another singularity that comforts me, and that is the great amount of dominion lodged in the hands of the Cantelmi in Latin lands. It may be said that separately and at different times they have held the government of all Italy.

"Giacomo I. was ambassador of peace to the Republic of Genoa, and representative to Lombardy, captain-general in Marca d' Ancona, and viceroy in the Abruzzi; Giacomo II. was vicar and governor of Florence; Bonavenature VIII., viceroy of Sicily; Rostaino VII., captain-general of the Serenissima, senator of Rome.

"Everywhere they have carried on the empire, and, in the experiment of diverse peoples, learned 'to know well how men unite to gain or to lose;' everywhere, also, they have fought and lost life in accomplishing some prodigy of valor; 'the good Cantelmo,' immortal in Tasso's verse, tinged the walls of Jerusalem with his royal blood. James II. died for the sake of the Florentines against Castruccio Castracane; the first duke of Sora Nicolò died, with Constantine Paleologo, in the defense of Constantinople;

Ascanio died in the waters of Lepanto by the side of Don John of Austria; Charles V. esteemed Bonaventura VIII. worthy of the defense of the entire empire, and the Emperor said of him that he would select Bonaventura as his champion, were the crown to be risked in a joust; the great Andrea gave the extraordinary example of a life applied to never-ceasing combat from his first youth to his last breath. . . . .

"These, in truth, are the most completed types that up to the present time have issued from my race; Andrea was one of the statliest heroes of obligation and of will, but we will not follow his fortunes. In Italy, in Germany, in Flanders, in France, in Spain —almost innumerable are the cities and spots conquered by him and added to the Catholic Empire, the sieges raised and sustained.

"He is the *Poliorcete, par excellence,* a prolific master of stratagems as was never another, bold and prudent at the same time, 'perceiving united in himself,' as one of his historians says, 'all of those endowments and qualities that in other more illustrious captains are separately observed.'

"But that which in my eyes raises him above all others was the unheard-of rigor of the discipline to which he subjected himself and his troops.

"Certain of his tricks of severity elated me more

than the sight of the flags he had taken from the enemy. Always commanding militia without pay and badly clothed, he succeeded in having them prompt and true as a sword, and no one ever knew better than he, the mode of imprinting *himself* upon the conduct of others. Eloquent and nervous in discourse, he always preferred the direct efficacy of example, even to the virtue of speech. When he led the infantry he went ever afoot at the head of his legions; he slept clothed, he ate and drank only what his soldiers ate and drank; he was the first in assault, the last in retreat; he refused to lay down his arms, though covered with wounds; he never touched booty on the field of victory or in subdued cities; and in Flanders he rendered himself so terrible that mothers frightened children with his name to obtain their obedience. Can a man carve his own effigy with a purer, more upright and sturdy relief? Did a medal ever issue from the puncheon with a prouder impress?

"In his century Andrea is surnamed the new Epaminondas, and in this indefatigable warrior the intellectual character of the race juts out again; not only was he most learned in the languages, a notable mathematician, a master of military architecture, and a writer on warlike science, but he was a good judge and splendid protector of the liberal arts.

"Eritio Puteano, dedicating a Latin work to him, addressed him as '*Armorum gloria Litterarum tutela.*' Cornelius Schent, of Antwerp, offering him one of his books of fanciful designs, represents him the Hero cultivator of elegance amid arms: '*Heros inter arma elegantias coleus.*'

"In this Andrea followed the familiar tradition at whose origin Fanetta Cantelmo, Lady of Romanino, shone out, crowned with flowers, the sonnetist 'with a certain spark divine' in a Court of Love amid the laurels of Provence. And does it not seem that some of the prodigious skill by which Alessandro elevated himself among Vinci's disciples at Milan was transmitted likewise into Andrea?

"He devised most novel forms of fortification, constructed on the Mosel river the celebrated fortress called, to the glory of its inventor, Fort Cantelmo; he manufactured strange arms that appeared the work of magic to his contemporaries. Is there not something Leonardesque in these talents of his that recalls Alessandro?"

I had uttered the name of Him, who, living in continual communion with my spirit, was held by me as the Genius of the race destined one day to rise again from the surviving lineage in a vision of sublime life.

"Be thou what thou oughtest to be." My task

had determined itself in definite lines under his glance and his admonition, and here in the hour in which a great thing was about to be resolved he placed himself at my side. I had him full of life before my eyes, as if his pallid, tyrannical hand were leaning upon the corner of a table near by, upon which were the statuette of Pallas, and the pomegranate with the pointed leaf and the glowing flower. "Oh, be thou what thou shouldst be!" And another youthful figure, which seemed his younger brother, held himself opposite like a reflection.

"Alessandro and Hercules!" I continued; "these are the two slain, purple flowers that the divine artificers, Leonardo and Ludovico, gathered and changed into indestructible essences. When Andrea Cantelmo died he had already manifested all of the energies that he bore within himself, and death overtook him at the threshold of old age, covered with glory, soon after that siege of Balaguer, that was the greatest of his undertakings, but these two, meeting life with hands full of the seeds of hope, had before each of them a vaster possibility.

"Their youthful heads seemed made to wear the royal crown, that ancient crown already borne by forefathers, and in one of them Vinci divined the future founder of a new principality, the triumphant Tyrant who should impose upon the multitudes the

yoke of that science and that Beauty to which the great master had initiated the favorite disciple.

"But Destiny postponed the fulfilling of the prediction, for both yielded their lives in the first burst of impetuosity. Hercules in the sands of the Po against the Slavonians, Alessandro on the banks of the Taro at the battle of Fornovo.

"Do you remember the verses with which Ariosto celebrated the beautiful son of Sigismund Cantelmo?

"'The boldest youth, who, at his age,
Had been from one pole to the other,
And from the extreme shores of the Indies
To where the sun sets . . . .'

"Too cruel was his death! Made prisoner in the rash invasion, he had his head cut off in his father's presence, upon the ship's row-lock that served as block, and I imagine that the blood burst from the cut like a flame, and burned the galley's side. I see it rather than imagine it.

"What a prodigious and terrible tempest of hot youth must have been that which excited the spur-thrust wherewith the horse was flung with fury against the enemy's defence! Ah, dear father, I, too, have experienced such tempests and my horse knows it, and the rubbish heaps of the Roman Cam-

pagna know it. . . . . Hercules in that instant certainly felt himself worthy to press between his knees the winged wild beast born from the blood of Medusa. *Cave adsum!* Ariosto, in celebrating it, has words that alone irradiate it with glory, telling how the audacious youth died for persevering in the purpose held by each Cantelmo, that of persisting even against the worst death in the spot esteemed to be the best. In the assault he had a companion at his side, and as both were upon the enemy,

> "'Saved himself, young Ferruffin,
> Cantelmo did remain.'"

He remained one against a thousand, and the divine Ludovico places his beautiful, bloody figure at the beginning of a song where Bradamante does wonders with his golden lance.

"But the death of Alessandro resembles that of a demi-god. At Fornovo, in the thick of the battle, a hurricane broke out, and the Taro with terrible violence overflowed its banks. All of a sudden, Alessandro disappeared like one of those Hellenic heroes of old, whom a whirlwind raised from earth and bore up transfigured to heaven. His body was never found, neither upon the field nor in any other place, but he is living, living through the centuries, with a life

more intense than ours. Vinci has not only handed down to me the representation, but the life, the real life.

"Dear father, if once you had seen the likeness, you could never forget it; it is unforgettable. Nothing in the world has an equal worth for me, and no treasure was ever guarded with more passionate jealousy. Who has given me the strength to sustain so long a solitude, and so severe a constriction? Who has infused into my spirit, even amid the harshest rigors of discipline, that kind of moderate intoxication that makes whatever effort seem trivial? Who but Alessandro?

"For me he represents the mysteriously significant power of character, inviolable by any one else, and never even by myself in my own person. All my life unfolds under his following glance, and truthfully, dear father, he who endures the assiduous trial of such a fire, is not unworthy.

"'Oh, be thou what thou oughtest to be!' This is his daily admonition, but while he thus incites me to become complete, he also holds before my eyes the vision of an existence superior to mine in dignity and strength. And I think ever of Him who must come after me."

I stopped, feeling that my voice trembled, and fearing that all at once the wave which filled my

heart would overflow, and so profoundly did the soul of the aged prince communicate with mine, that at that moment he involuntarily stretched forth to me both hands.

"In as much as a double desire is necessary to create this One, who is to surpass his makers," I added, turning towards him with a low tone, "I could not desire a higher alliance than that which would give me the right to call you father, as I call you now."

And conquered by emotion, I remained bent towards him, straining in mine own his trembling hands, while, without speaking, he lightly touched my forehead with his lips, but in the silence, even between the palpitations of my heart and the painful breathing of the father, Anatolia's light step could be heard leaving the room.

Did she go aside to weep? Her figure that I had seen motionless and white in the shadow, sparkled within me like a constellation of tears. Did she go to weep alone? Perhaps she was to meet the sisters on her way—that doubt unexpectedly disturbed me, for my gaze had fallen upon the cameo which glittered on the paternal hand.

And while the perfume of evening ascended from the walled garden, a sentiment indistinct, as of a fas-
tion thickening about me, spread through my
vith the slowness of that twilight shadow.

In the meantime what was the heart of her who was to depart from the old home? In what fashion did her mystical life dispose itself around the memory of that supreme hour marked by the dial-hand upon the luminous marble?

Me Lvmen, vos vmbra regit.

Perhaps she had more than once returned to the little cemetery of the yew trees and the anemones, perhaps she had placed her graceful hands anew upon the quadrant to endure its heat, and perhaps my exhortation had again come to her mind.

"Warm your hands in the sunshine, immerse them in the sunshine, these poor hands, for in a little while you will hold them crossed upon your breast, or hidden under the brown woolen apron, in the convent gloom."

And more than once, perhaps, covering the cipher indicative of the divine hour with her palm, she had waited, palpitating in the great silence to see the shadow of the dial-hand touch the extremity of the ring-finger, as in that day of dreams, and perhaps she had wept because the miracle of love was not renewed.

Sine sole sileo.

I united the image of the custodian of herbariums, of which Oddo had told me, and the image of that sad soul wandering around the sun-dial that had

marked the hour of happiness for her in vain, and I reflected, "If I possessed the power of fashioning thee a beautiful fate, as artificers mould obedient wax, O Massimilla, thou who camest towards me from an arid orchard, where a funeral vow had enclosed thee, I would complete thy ideal figure with death, I would complete thy perfection with a suitable death, as having once reached that part of life beyond which one intending to return can go no further, no other hour of worth awaits thee, and I would so make it, that guided by divine remembrance, thou mightst return to the place where in fancy I gathered the coronal anemones to pour upon thy head, and there again discover the harmonious attitude in which I first praised thee, while the instant in which the point of shadow reached the extremity of the ring-finger, should be thy death. Then I myself, under the fixed gaze of the prostrate caryatid, would dig the sepulchre for thy frail body, and arrange thee as the gentle women arranged Beatrice in Dante's vision, and cover thy head also with a veil like theirs, but I would not put the cross at thy tomb, nor other pious emblem, though to engrave an epitaph worthy of thy gentleness I would invoke as thy heavenly Lover the last son of the Graces born in Palestine, or Meleager of Gadara, garlanded with hyacinths, the

singer of maidens smitten with early death, his soft flute crying:

"'Oh Earth, thou universal mother, I salute thee!

Be thou light for this virgin, so little does she weigh upon thee!'"

It pleased me to adorn thus the sentiment she inspired in me, and to convert her sadness into poetry.

"Has the narcissus bulb in the herbarium sprouted for the third time?" I asked her unexpectedly one day while we were upon the waters of the Saurgo in the vicinity of the dead city.

She was very much disconcerted, and looked at me with almost terrified eyes.

"How did you know it?"

I smiled and repeated:

"Then it has budded?"

"No, no more," she answered, bending down her face.

We were alone in a small skiff, that I myself was guiding with the only oar. Violante, Anatolia and Oddo were in other barks conducted by boatmen. The river, here so broad and slow that it seemed almost a marsh, was covered with an innumerable drift of water-lilies, whose great, white, rose-shaped flowers floated among the shining leaves, and exhaled

a humid fragrance that seemed to possess the virtue of quenching thirst.

In this place Simonetto had completed his herbariums in the murderous autumn, and I imagined the figure of the young herbalist bent over the waters, exploring the mire at a time when the water-lilies were about to hide themselves. His *hortus siccus* ought certainly to contain dull specimens of all that aquatic flora diffused about the ruin.

As Massimilla's eyes followed the motions of my oar, that from time to time cleft some leaves or broke some stem, I said, softly:

"Are you thinking of Simonetto?"

She started.

"How do you know?" she asked me again, agitated and covered with blushes.

"From Oddo."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, without dissembling her sorrow at my knowledge, which seemed to wound her, "Oddo told you of it—"

I guessed how painful the intelligence was to her, as she relapsed into silence, and I rested my oar a moment, while the light vessel remained motionless amid that immense whiteness of living corols.

"Did you love him much?" I asked her, with a sweetness that perhaps reminded her of our first conversations.

"As I love Oddo; as I love Antonello," she answered, with a tremor in her voice, and without raising her eyelids.

After an interval, I asked again:

"Do you enter the monastery to sacrifice yourself to his memory?"

"No, not for that; it would be too late for that now."

"Why, then?"

She did not answer; but, as I watched her hands contract in nervous twisting, I understood all the involuntary cruelty of my useless demand.

"Is it true that you have resolved to depart within a few days?" I added, almost timidly.

"It is true."

Her lips grew pale and trembled.

"Oddo and Anatolia will accompany you?"

She nodded her head, compressing her mouth, as if to hold in a sob.

"I beg your pardon, Massimilla, if I have hurt you," I said, with deep emotion, feeling a heavy sadness fall suddenly upon me.

"Hush, I pray you!" she implored, with an unrecognizable voice; "do not make me cry! What would the sisters think? I could not hide the tears, and I feel suffocated now."

A shout from Oddo from the ruins recalled us.

Anatolia and Violante had already set foot in the dead city, and a man came towards us with his skiff, judging our delay, caused perhaps by my inexperience in urging the bark through the intricacy of the water-lilies.

"Ah, I will always bear within me the sorrow of having lost thee," I said to myself of her who was to leave us. "I would see thee composed in the perfection of death rather than know thee diminished in an existence unlike that which my love and my art promised thee, and perhaps thou wouldst have stimulated me to explore some remote region of my world, that without thee will remain abandoned and uncultivated. . . . ."

The boat glided lightly over the snow-white shoal, the calyxes and leaves undulating in the track, and revealing in the crystalline clearness the wilderness of stems, pallid and listless as if nourished upon Lethean mire. The ruin of Linturno, embraced by waters and flowers, had in its centurial stony inertia, the appearance of a heap of great broken skeletons.

There is not so much lifeless vacuity in the orbits of human skulls as there was in the hollows of those consumed, worn-out stones, whitened like bone from recurring mid-winters and dog-days. And I imagined that I was transporting a dead virgin.

Then everything in that cloudless noon seemed

touched with my sadness. We wandered long through the old ruin searching for vestiges of a life that had disappeared, finding uncertain traces which roused ghostly imaginings—a fancy of garlanded youths, descending singing to the paternal stream to offer it their unshorn, growing heads of hair, or a white procession of neophytes, going down to receive baptism, nourished with milk and honey like little children.

A gloomy legend of martyrs, "*Martyris ossa jacent.* . . . ." which we read upon a fragment of sarcophagus, diffused a painful holiness upon the pagan ruins, and here and there we found emblems and ambiguous symbols among the graven stones; the eagle of Jove and Cybele's lion subdued by the evangelists; Dionysius' vines, bent to express the word of the Saviour; Diana's stag, signifying the panting soul; the peacock of Era, as the glory of the risen soul.

Occasionally a snake slid from a hole between the stones and twigs, vanishing rapidly like an arrow, while an invisible bird strangely imitated the noise of the clappers that indicated the hour in the silence of Good Friday.

"And your great Madonna, where is it?" Anatolia asked me, remembering my careless words.

We searched a pathway among the rubbish heaps to arrive at the ruined basilica at the extremity of

a little island upon a branch of the Saurgo, contiguous to the rocks.

"Perhaps the water will hinder our passing," said I, perceiving near the wall a flash of light and a sparkling like mirrors.

The stream in fact had inundated a part of the sacred ruin, and an aquatic wilderness branched out there in peace, but we discovered a breach, through which we could penetrate into the apse. As we entered each of the three sisters made the sign of the cross, amid a great whirring of wings.

There was a damp coolness and a confused sea-green light; the apse and some pillars of the central nave were still standing, and formed a sort of cavern where the waters had invaded almost up to the deserted altar, and a multitude of water-lilies, larger and whiter than those through which we had navigated, were densely thick as if in adoration, at the feet of the great museful Madonna that alone occupied the vaulted golden heaven. She did not bear the Infant upon her arms, but solitary stood enwrapped in a cloaking of lead color, as if by a shadow of mourning, a profound mystery of sorrow in her large, fixed eyes. Away up in the curve of the arch, the swallows had adjusted a delicate crown of nests, following the order of words written in rotation,

"*Quasi Platanvs exaltata svm jvxta aqvas.*"

And here the three maidens kneeled down together and prayed.

"If we should leave thee in this exile with the water-lilies and the swallows!" I thought, looking at Massimilla, who bowed ever nearer to the ground in her prayer. "You would live here like a retired naiad who had neglected Artemide to adore the melancholy new divinity." And I imagined her metamorphosis—her solitary rites performed amid the choir of swallows, after which she would plunge into the waters and descend to the roots of the flowers. . . . .

But, really, nothing here in my eyes surpassed in whiteness the nape of a neck almost overwhelmed by the weight of hair denser than the marble branches of grapes that ornamented the altar front.

I saw Violante upon her knees for the first time, and that act was so unbecoming to the quality of her beauty, that I suffered from it as from a discord, and, with a strange uneasiness, I awaited her to rise up from between the two symbolic peacocks that opened their jewel-eyed feathers in the midst of the clusters of grapes.

She arose before the others, with one of those exquisite movements in which her beauty seemed to surpass itself, in the same manner that a continuous light seems to increase if it unexpectedly produces a sparkle. *Exaltata juxta aquas!*

She returned with me upon the river, and seated herself upon the little prow opposite me, while I, standing, pushed the boat with the oar. An unconquerable confusion possessed me, and, the hand impearled with blood, the briars and brambles loaded with flowers, reappeared to my memory.

This was the first time since that distant hour that I had found myself alone with Violante face to face.

"I am very thirsty," she said, bending back towards the water with a movement that in expressing the desire almost made her even with the fluid, voluptuous element.

"Don't drink this water!" I begged her, seeing that she bared her hands.

"Why?"

"Don't drink it!"

Then she immersed her naked hands, broke off a lily, and bent over it to breathe its humid fragrance, while an indistinct trepidation about us invaded the floral drift, and as the sun had fallen behind the rocks a rosy reflection, scarcely perceptible, fell from the evening sky upon the innumerable whiteness.

"Look at the lilies!" I exclaimed, pausing upon my oar, "does it not seem to you that at this moment they have an extraordinary expression of life?"

She again plunged in her hands up to the wrists,

and held them there artlessly and unmindful, like floating flesh flowers, and while her gaze fell upon the stirred multitude, the smile of her mouth was so divine that my soul ascribed to it the virtue of a miracle.

She was indeed worthy of working all wonders, and of subduing even the soul of things to her beauty. I did not dare to speak, so eloquent was the silence at her side, but bending over towards the water we were united one to the other by a fascination not unlike that which we had enjoyed in common the first day, in sight of the glowing rock. The hawks did not cry over our heads, but the flying swallows chattered, casting almost a flash of light at times from their white breasts.

"Well, do we not move? Have you no more strength?" she asked me, turning with an indefinable accent of derision, and gazing deep into my eyes. "Do you not see that the other boats are already far away?"

She regarded the companion barks for a time, lightly wrinkling her forehead.

"Anatolia is calling us," she added; "make haste!"

The Saurgo seemed to widen in the sunset, to fade away into infinite distance, to regain the strength of its current, to promise to lead us into lands more beautiful, and in that sovereign creature, bent over

in her thirst towards that great, sweet, rosy stream, as if by a violent desire for fluidity corresponding to her voluptuous essence, there was such a mystery of beauty and of poesy, that my soul stretched toward her with the most fervent act of adoration.

"Look!" said the revealer to me then, showing me the spectacle she might have been able to create with a gesture. "Look!"

Around us, upon the water agitated by a slight shivering, the living petals closed with a motion almost labial, hesitated for some instants, shrank back, became gradually submerged, and disappeared under the leaves, one after the other, or together in groups, as if a somniferous power attracted them from the depths. Broad spaces remained deserted, but sometimes in the midst of them a single late-blooming lily shed its extreme grace in that lingering.

A vague melancholy wavered upon the water where each of these loiterers disappeared, and then through the great, sweet, rosy stream, it seemed as if the nocturnal dreams of a submerged multitude began to exhale.

But upon the summit of the Corace was the unexpected apparition that ultimately determined our fates.

We had made a stop at Scultro to visit the ancient abbey, where the remains of that sumptuous mansoleum are preserved, the work of the master, Walter of Allemagna, erected to the memory of herself and her sons by that magnificent Cantelmo, *Domina Rita*, who, betrothed to Giovanni Antonio Caldora, was the mother of the great leader, Jacopo.

And in that damp chapel Anatolia and I were the last to contemplate the supine figure of the young hero, who was enclosed up to the throat in heavy armor, leaving only the hairy head uncovered that rested so royally upon the marble pillow.

Having left the mules upon the tableland, we arrived after a long time, over a rough, narrow path, at the northern brow of the original crater, changed into a lake, to which Secli gives the name.

At our feet we had upon one side the tawny valley of the Saurgo, upon the other the strong spurs that the greater mountain ridge stretches into the underlying plains, bounded in the distance by the sea. From the immense cerulean crystal over our heads, some almost motionless clouds were hanging, dazzling and harmonious as snow-drifts.

Seated upon the stones, we gazed in silence. Violante and Massimilla appeared fatigued, and Oddo had not yet ceased panting, but Anatolia went calmly gathering the tiny flowers in the crevices.

For myself, I experienced within me a strange, vacillating disquiet, that at times densened and oppressed me like an anxiety, for I felt that the hour of choice was now inevitable upon me, and that I could no longer prolong those tormenting, delightful alternations of desire and perplexity, nor longer endeavor to blend the three noble rhythms into one noble harmony.

That day, for the last time, the three maidens appeared to me united, under the light of the same heaven. What time had elapsed since the first hour in which, ascending by the old terraced stairs, I had composed the first music from the virgin voices and shadows, and accomplished the first transfiguration among the signs of neglect and forgetfulness? Tomorrow the brief spell would be broken, and forever.

I now felt the necessity of repeating to Anatolia with my lips the words already addressed by me in silence to the pure secret image that had been the witness of my conversation with the father.

Even before, in the deserted chapel, in the presence of that tomb, raised up by the faith of a brave woman, had we not both participated in a like sentiment and a like thought, and before this I had said to her silently in my soul, "Thou, also, couldst be the mother of heroes. O, Wise One! I know that thou hast gathered my desire and buried it in thy faithful heart,

where it will flame like a diamond. I know that, in fancy, thou hast watched mysteriously all night over the slumber of a child. While his body slept with deep respirations, thou upheldst in thy palms, his tangible soul like a sphere of crystal, and thy bosom swelled with marvelous predictions."

Now that she was about to depart with the novice and brother upon a justly sad journey, I felt the necessity of exchanging an assured promise with her, but my disquiet became grave as anxiety, and an actual peril seemed to menace me, and I could not but recognize the cause in the agitation that Violante's every act continually gave me.

There beneath us in the valley was the ruin of Linturno, like a heap of white stones, or a bare outskirt of sandy shore in the midst of sweet, dear waters, where only yesterday, as if by a double miracle, she had enchanted both the water-lilies and my own soul.

She charmed me now, if my eyes gazed upon her, for seated upon the stone as upon the plinth the first day, she was like unto the immortal statues. Once more I considered her as both present and far away, as upon that first day, and I thought again:

"It is but just that she should remain intact, for she could be possessed without shame only by a god. Never will her entrails carry the deforming weight;

never will the milk's wave violate the pure outline of her bosom. . . . ."

With a certain impulse as if to free myself from a yoke, I rose to my feet, and turning to her who gathered the tiny flowers in the crevices, I said:

"As you are not tired, Anatolia, will you ascend with me to the summit?"

"I am ready," she assented, with her clear cordial voice, and approaching Massimilla she laid the small flowers upon her lap.

Violante remained where she was, holding her veil between her fingers impassive, as if she had not heard but I felt that her eyes were not gazing upon the surroundings, and I was as much disturbed as if a ray of fascination, emanating from the occult profundity in which her gaze was fixed, had reached even to me.

"Don't be late in descending," said Oddo, with an imploring sound in his voice, showing in his thin face the sense of evil that the heights gave him, an almost continual fear of dizziness; "we will wait for you."

The peak of the Corace rose against the sky, naked and acute as a helmet, and inclined somewhat southward, while the pathway to reach it ran along the steep rib almost as narrow as the brink of a precipice, where the two slopes were neatly separated.

So difficult and so dangerous was the passage here,

that I offered Anatolia my hand for support, and placing hers within it, she smilingly staggered over the ruggedness of the rocks.

We were already out of sight, free and alone, rulers of the immense space. It seemed to us that each breath purified the blood in our veins, and lightened the weight of our flesh, and the strong aroma like a powerful drug, that the sun's fire extracted from the rare Alpine grasses, accelerated the rhymth of our life.

We stopped, seized by a sudden shortness of breath, and our hands too strongly clasped, loosened. I looked into my companion's eyes, but she no longer smiled, her face became grave, almost sad, as if darkened by regret.

"Let us stop here," she murmured, lowering her eyelids, "I cannot go any further."

"Just a little way," said I, pursued by a vehement desire to go on upward, "only a few steps more and we touch the summit!"

"I cannot go any further," she repeated, with a spent voice that did not seem her own, passing her hands over her face as if to remove from it something that shadowed it.

Then she tried to smile at me. "What a strange illusion!" she exclaimed, "the summit is still far off. It seems as if we could touch it, but the higher we go the more distant it seems to become."

Then after a pause, in which she seemed to listen to the deep beatings of her heart, she added, "And there is a soul that is suffering down there."

She turned a face, darkened by thought, towards the spot where the sisters were waiting.

"Let us turn back, Claudio," she continued, with an accent that I will never forget, because never human voice expressed in so brief a sound so much hidden meaning.

"Dear, dear Anatolia!" I cried, seizing her hands, and full of the extraordinary sentiment given me by her simple words, in which for me was the indubitable indication of an inward deed almost divine; "let me first repeat to you what I have said to you more than once in my silence! Where could I more worthily offer my loyalty than here amid these heights, to you, who are the noblest of creatures, Anatolia?"

She became very pale, not like one who hears an announcement of joy long expected and invoked, but like him who receives in a vital part an unseen wound, and though to all appearance she remained motionless, a certain frightened shiver, an instinctive movement of horror was cast towards me in spirit, something that I could not perceive with my eyes, but with one of those unknown senses that are sometimes manifested upon the woof of human nerves in

an instantaneous vibration, and disappear forever, leaving the conscience astonished, hurt.

She turned to me with a glance full of indefinable inquietude.

"You speak as if we were alone," she said, confused; "as if I were alone; as if I were alone—"

"Anatolia, what is the matter with you?" I asked, disturbed by her inexplicable perturbation, by the profound alteration of her countenance, by the incoherence of her words.

And a thought flashed upon my uncertainty: had she not been suddenly assailed by that mysterious terror, that species of panic which reigns in the solitudes of silent, perilous mountains? She who had been accustomed for so many years to her gloomy prison, a resigned martyr within those ancient walls? She was certainly in the power of the terrible fascination and her spirit was bewildered.

A most wonderful spectacle spread out at our feet upon every side. The chain of rocks, manifest in their desolate sterility up to the extreme ridges, extended like an immense assemblage of gigantic, defunct things, left as the vestiges of some primordial titaomachy for the amazement of mankind. Demolished towers, cleft walls, beaten-down citadels, ruined domes, crumbling porticoes, mutilated colossuses, prows of vessels, backs of monsters, carcasses of

titans—the entire mass, with its reliefs and its dark, intricate places, simulated a formidable structure, while the distances were so clear that I distinguished every outline, as if the rock that Violante had shown me from the window-sill with her creative gesture had enlarged infinitely under my eyes.

The remotest points were defined against the sky with the same precise ruggedness that they had near the crater clefts in the reflection of the sunshine.

Huge-mouthed, the spherical crater opened widely with a sort of vehement twirl in its descent, like a whirlpool, although inert. Partly gray as ashes, partly red as rust, it was here and there interrupted by long white spaces, sparkling as salt, whose metallic immobility was mirrored by the water collected at the bottom, and opposite to us, suspended from the edge over the abyss, like a petrified village, was Secli, the solitary hermit-like hamlet, where from ancient times a small, industrious people had manufactured cat-gut cords for musical instruments.

"You are tired," I said to my dear companion, seeking to draw her towards a stone that seemed to me could prevent the view of the abyss upon one side, at least, and, with its contact, give back her sense of stability.

"You are tired, Anatolia, and this fatigue is unusual for you, and this spectacle perhaps a little

frightening. Lean here and close your eyes for some minutes. I am beside you, here is my arm, and I can lead you back without peril. Close your eyes, now, for some minutes."

She attempted again to smile at me.

"No, no," she said; "don't think about it, Claudio."

And then, after a pause, she went on, almost secretly and with a changed voice:

"It is another thing. If I should close my eyes, I might, perhaps, see—"

My heart trembled like a leaf in an unknown wind, and, though Anatolia's face was again composed in a grave, calm sadness, and through all of her figure a sentiment of domination over evil was diffused, I, by indistinct analogies, bethought me of the sudden anxieties of Antonello, his disquiet that was an infallible warning, and the previsions that illuminated his pale eyes.

"Have you understood, Anatolia?" I asked her, taking her hand as we stood backed against the stone, side by side. "Have you understood that you, you alone, are the companion that my heart named that evening when your father kissed my forehead in consent? You rose and went out of the room light as a spirit, and, I do not know why, but I imagined your face all wet with tears. Tell me if you wept, Anatolia, and if my dream was dear to you!"

She did not answer, but I, holding her hand, thought that the purest blood of her heart flowed magnetically to her finger-tips.

"When I returned to Rebursa that evening," I continued, to elate her with hope, "I saw the star shining over one of my old towers, and such faith had your presence infused into my soul, that I considered the circumstance a divine omen. Since then I unite two images in that lustre,—you know what the other one is. I hear again the first words with which you turned towards me there upon the staircase, recalling that 'immense goodness.' All that day the image evoked did not detach itself from your side, as if it would show me its choice. She herself in a coming night will accompany me to the dwelling that was full of her smile and that to-day is deserted. Look—down there!"

She gazed upon the distant towers of Rebursa in the deep basin where the pendulous clouds imprinted broad circles of shade, then her gaze passed over to Trigento, and in the interval the signs of an unspeakable inward violence passed over her countenance. She shook her head, freeing her hand from mine.

"The happiness is forbidden to me," she said in a firm, sorrowful voice, holding her eyes ever intent upon the garden of her labors, and the house of her

martyrdom. "I, as well as Massimilla, am consecrated, and my vow also is inviolable. It is not merely a voluntary act of mine, Claudio, but I feel it now to be a necessary sacrifice, from which I could not withdraw. You heard my answer when you invited me to ascend the summit with you; you saw how easy it appeared for me at first with the support of your hand, but afterwards—I could go no further; we have not attained the summit. You see, I am here nailed to the stone. You have made me an offer of which you do not know the worth as I know it, and here I am oppressed by a sadness so strong that I fear not being able to bear it; I who have never been afraid to suffer!"

I dared neither to interrupt her nor to touch her, a kind of religious fear possessed me. With a stronger emotion than that which had stirred me that solemn evening with her father, I felt at my side something palpitate, even without turning towards her, something infinitely august and mysterious, like divine substances guarded under covers in the inmost recesses of temples. The voice was speaking almost in my ear, but nevertheless it seemed to reach me from illimitable distance, and the words were simple, but they were uttered upon the heights of life where the human soul reaches only to transfigure itself into ideal Beauty.

"Look down there," said she softly; "look at the house where from the first day we welcomed you as a brother, where our father received you as a son, and where you found intact the memory of your dear dead; look how far away it seems! And yet I feel it joined to me by a thousand invisible bonds stronger than any chain. Even here I feel that my whole life mingles with that little of life that is suffering down there. Ah, perhaps you cannot understand! But fancy, Claudio, the atrocity of the fate that hangs over us! Think of that poor demented mother, that aged father, exhausted and infirm, that other victim who trembles continually upon the brink of madness, and that other still so close to him, who is under the same condemnation!

"And the horror of the contagion worse than the plague, the solitude, the narrowness, the wants, the suffering. Ah, you cannot understand! From the very first day, I feared to sadden you; I sought to spare you the worst afflictions, to hide from you the worst miseries; I tried always to interpose myself between you and our misfortune. Seldom, if ever, have you found yourself in the real melancholy of our house. We have led you into the open amid the flowers that for your sake alone we have taken to loving again, and in our abandoned garden you have been able to revive something dead.

"But think of the hidden torture! You cannot see, but I see from here all that is happening within there, as if the walls were of glass and I might touch them with my forehead. All life there seems suspended, father and son are enclosed in the same room, the one increasing the sufferings of the other, hearkening to every noise, and daring neither to go out nor to speak, both awaiting my return, deprived of all strength, and listening, ever hoping to recognize my voice and my step.

"And *she* is furious! She searches me through all the passages and corridors, through all the rooms, calling me with a loud voice, stopping before a closed door, and setting herself to listen at it or to beat it, and there within, my two poor souls hear her panting, and tremble at every blow, and know nothing but to look into each other's eyes, with what torture! My God!"

She put her hands to her temples with an instinctive movement as if to restrain a retrospect of suffering, while her whole body, separated from the stone, inclined towards the distant spot of anguish, and for some instants I too bent over in her same position, and remained suspended upon the edge of the precipice, my throat aching with the pain that she had communicated to me, and my gaze fixed upon the far-off dwelling where those souls were languishing.

"Think," she went on to say, but her voice was broken now, "think, Claudio, what would happen to them if I were no longer there, if I should abandon them! When I absent myself even for a little I feel nothing but sorrow and remorse, every time that I cross the threshold to go out a funereal presentiment binds my heart, and it seems to me that re-entering, I must find the house full of outcries and weeping."

An unconquerable shivering shook her violently all over, and her eyes dilated as if an atrocious vision filled them with horror.

"Antonello—" she faltered, and for some seconds she could not utter another word.

I looked at her with unspeakable sorrow, and suffered in my soul from each contraction of her dear lips; the vision that was in her eyes passed before mine, and I saw Antonello's white emaciated face, the incessant trembling of his eye-lids, his painful smile, his confused, orderless gestures, and the sudden waves of terror that invaded his long, lean body, agitating it like a fragile reed.

"Antonello—attempted to die—I alone know it—no one else, not even Oddo. Woe is me!"

Leaning against the stone she shook with a trembling that she did not attempt to control.

"One night, God warned me, God sent me. Be He ever praised! I entered his room—and I found him—"

Suffocated with feeling, she touched her throat confusedly with convulsed fingers, quivering, overpowered, with courage fleeing at the remembrance, as if the noose were tightening upon her now, she, who had known how to repress a shriek at the sight of the senseless body, who had revived life from her own strength and vigor, had accomplished her task without calling aid, had hidden within herself the horrible secret, and had lived since then with the frightful image impressed upon her soul, from fear to fear, anxiety to anxiety!

Thus in her sublime truth she revealed herself to me desperately devoted to an affection that had its root in the deepest and most sacred instinct of being. The voice of blood seemed to cry through all her veins, the bonds of blood held her every fibre. She was born to wear the sweet and dreadful shackles until death, she was disposed to consume herself like a holocaust to nourish the wavering flame of the hearth side. With what unheard-of love would she love the creature of her own viscera?

"You speak of abandon," I said to her, making a painful effort to express myself, for each utterance of mine seemed weak and inopportune before the greatness and beauty of that sentiment which had been revealed to me; "you speak of abandon, Anatolia, you forget that I too from the first day believed

to find again in your house my father, my sisters, my brothers, and you do not know what a filial and fraternal pity—not comparable to yours, which is superhuman, but still worthy to serve with acts,—may be in my heart."

She shook her head.

"Ah, Claudio," she answered, with a sorrowful smile of her parched lips, "your generosity misleads you. My soul is still dazzled by the flame of your dreams, but troubled by I know not what restrained violence and perilous spirit that appear in you from time. A desire for struggle and mastery agitates you, and you would like to oblige life with every means to maintain its promises to you. You are young, extremely proud of your blood, master of your strength, and sure in your faith. Who can place a limit to your conquests?"

Into her last words she had infused, like an unlooked-for exaltation, all the power of her clear, ardent voice, and, from the thrill it gave me, I understood what a vigorous inciter of energies she would have been, who, in her goodness and her patience possessed, nevertheless, the primary instinct of her imperious race.

"But imagine, Claudio, a conquerer who drags behind him a car full of invalids, and who prepares himself for battle contemplating their wasted

countenances and listening to their lamentations! Can you imagine it? If life is cruel, he who resolutely faces it must necessarily assume the condition of an enemy, and every care and inconvenience will, sooner or later excite his anger, and disgust."

She had succeeded in repressing the excess of her emotion, and again showed herself to me in her courageous firmness, speaking now without tremor.

"I myself," she continued, "would not I myself some day become forgetful? Would I not feel myself entirely seized by new affections, by new cares, by the triumph of your hopes? The task which you wish to assign to the companion of your efforts is too great, Claudio. Your words have sunk deep in my memory, but, alas, it is not possible to feed two fires at the same time; the new one would shortly become so voracious that to it I should sacrifice all the wealth of my soul, and the old one is so feeble that if I turn my head elsewhere it will go out."

She ceased speaking, and again lowered her head, but suddenly, as if again assailed by her first agitation, looked around her, and a certain movement of her dry, parched lips told me of her thirst. Then she turned towards me, and, gazing deep into my eyes with a kind of internal violence, she demanded:

"Has your heart truly chosen me? Have you

scrutinized it to the depths? Or is it shrouded in illusion?"

I was so strongly disturbed by her gaze and her sudden doubt, that I felt myself become as pale as if she had accused me of a falsehood.

"Anatolia, what are you saying?" I cried.

She moved away from the stone, and took several uncertain steps, finally stopping as if to listen, agitated and uneasy.

"There is some soul that is suffering through these pathways," she murmured, with the strange accent she had had at first, and she stood perplexed for some instants, while her hand sought her forehead with a vague gesture.

Then, turning to me rapidly, anxiously, as if she were pursued, and feared not having time to pronounce the words, she hastened to add:

"I am going away to-morrow; I must accompany Massimilla; I have not the courage to let her depart with Oddo alone, but I feel that I must be with her even to the portal of her retreat. She goes to pray for us. . . . . And I know that she goes not as to a consolation but as to a death, and for that it is necessary that I assist her. All is over with and done, for her. I shall be away several days, and during that time one of us will be alone at Trigento. It is the first-born—she has almost a right—she is worthy. I

do not know, but your heart may tell you something, perhaps the truth. I assure you, Claudio, that I will pray, with what fervor I have in my soul, that upon returning I may know that all has been resolved according to the welfare of each. Who knows? Perhaps a great happiness hangs over you. I believe in your Star, Claudio, but for me it is a prohibition, —I know not how to say it, to say it—it is a shadow upon my inclination. A strange fear came before me, and then—a sadness, a sadness that I do not yet know."

She stopped, breathless, confused, miserable, as if she regained the sentiment of infinite desolation that broadened around us in the relentless burning heat.

"You, too, how you suffer!" she murmured, without looking at me, and extending both of her hands to me, she continued with a supreme effort.

"Now farewell, for I must turn back. I thank you for the honor you have done me, Claudio, and I want you to always think of me as a devoted sister. My tenderness will never fail you!"

She turned her head, because her eyes were filled with tears, and I kissed both hands.

"Farewell!" she repeated, making a movement to set out upon the descent, but still lingering upon the stone.

"Stay awhile yet, I pray you, Anatolia," I begged,

checking her, "a few minutes here yet in the shade that you may recover a little strength. The descent is rough."

"They are waiting for us! They are waiting for us!" she stammered, almost beside herself, and communicating also to me her frantic anxiety. "Let us go, Claudio. I will lean against you; I would feel worse if I delayed again; I would not be able to take another step. . . . . Oh what horrible thirst!"

I saw well that her poor mouth was consumed with thirstiness, which I would have willingly opened a vein to quench, so anguished was the pity that bound me. There was no trace of water around, but the waters of the lake that seemed like incandescent lead in the depth of the extinct crater. Rapid images crossed my brain as in a delirium of fever; the great, rosy stream covered with water-lilies, Violante leaning over the edge of the boat, her face bent to breathe the humidity of the flower, the hardness of her glance sharpened by the contracted eyebrows. . . . .

But we started as a wave of sudden sound reached us from an unknown source. So grave was the silence in these high deserts that it had appeared inviolable, and through the confusion of our senses that unexpected profanation at first struck us as something extraordinary. Anatolia pressed my arm, interrogating me with dilated eyes.

"Secli," I said to her, recognizing the nature of the sound, "the bells of Secli."

And one beside the other, we stood listening, bent towards the sonorous crater, in the shadow cast by the stone over our heads.

Resonant as a gigantic timbrel the empty hollow reverberated with the vibrations of the resounding metals, confounding them in a continuous deep booming that spread indefinitely through the solitude of light. Upon all the desolation, where original substance glittered, petrified in its thousand expressions of fury and of grief, over the golden valley furrowed by the serpentine river, over all the wild, picturesque surroundings sloping to the distant sea, upon every spot, the bronze voice, modulated by the terrible, igneous mouth, shed its mysterious speech.

From part to part it seemed to reach, higher still into the space without limit, into regions beyond the mountains and the sea, there where sight aweary loses itself, and where, like a pollen-laden breeze, thought, formless and non-coercible, yet endowed with dim creative power, lets itself be carried away.

A great confused feeling, in which were agitated innumerable things of sorrow and of joy, of past and future, of death and of life, tormented my conscience, seeming to dilate and deepen it as the tempest does the ocean.

I regarded with amazement the stygian lake, opaque and inert as the blind eye of a subterranean world. I gazed at the vertical crater in which the impetuosity of primitive fire had remained fixed, as sometimes the contraction of a last spasm rests upon the lips of a skeleton, and my glance stopped over the humble houses of Secli, that fragile human nest that can scarcely be distinguished from the rock to which it clings, while a fantastic imagining passed before me of that shy, silent, ignorant people intent for generations upon reducing lambs' entrails to musical cords destined to express in art's language life's highest aspirations, and to intoxicate myriads of unknown souls.

The booming continued, regularly and without pause, upon the inflamed air. My companion was motionless at my side, and I dared neither to speak nor to break the fascination; but all at once she turned and burst into tears, as if she had at that moment witnessed the end of some agony. Leaning against the stone, with her face between her palms, she sobbed desperately.

"Anatolia, Anatolia! what is it?" I exclaimed. "Answer me, Anatolia; speak to me!"

And the torture continuing for me, I was about to seize her wrists and uncover her face, when I heard near by the rustle of a swift step upon the stones,

some one breathing exhaustedly, and then I perceived a distinct shadow.

"You, Violante?"

Coming up through the steep rocks she had the springiness, the dash of a wild beast, with something hostile and hurtful in all of her person, and her head was totally enveloped in the dense azure veil that she wore, which hid her countenance like a mask as far as her chin, while her eyes gleamed through the tissue.

She stopped near the stone, almost unfriendly, throwing her head backward like one who is about to be suffocated. She certainly felt suffocated, but she did not unbind herself, and the vehemence of the panting made her bosom heave and her veil flutter, while an unrestrained shudder violently shook the hands covered with lacerated gloves, torn perhaps against the sharp stones in some dangerous fall.

"We have waited for you," she said at last in a voice somewhat broken and hissing from her shortness of breath. "We have waited for you very long, and, not seeing you return, I stirred myself—to meet you."

Through her veil I could see the motion of her convulsed lips, and I guessed the transfiguration of her face under that suffocating blue mask that she would not raise. The internal shock grew so vio-

lently from instant to instant that it was not possible for me to open my lips, but I felt that not only upon me had the necessity for silence fallen.

The booming of the bronze, reverberated from the crater, passed continually over our heads. Anatolia had ceased her sobs, but the traces of weeping remained upon her countenance, and her eyelids, that she held half closed, appeared red.

"Let us go," she said, softly, looking neither at me nor her sister.

And, accompanied by the booming, we went forward down the descent in the waste of light; a torturing descent that seemed never to finish. According to the vicissitudes of the path, they went ahead or remained behind, while I upheld first one and then the other as they hesitated. At every moment my heart stood still with fear to see them fall.

When the bells of Secli were silent we experienced an illusory relief, but quickly perceived that in the quiet of the air the evident gasping of our respirations increased our suffering, and we seemed to hear, almost too distinctly, the boomimg of our veins.

Under her azure mask, Violante resisted the choking with a wild pertinacity. Like mine and like Anatolia's, her throat was surely burning with a horrible thirst, and once, as I took her hand to help her,

I saw through the lacerations of the glove, a little of her blood where the skin was grazed, recalling to me with intense perturbation, the brambles loaded with flowers.

Later on, upon the plateau where my men were waiting with the mules, and where we stopped, consumed with thirst and worn with fatigue, I arranged for the last time, in a concord infinitely beautiful and sorrowful, the beauty and the sorrow of the three princesses.

They were not in the walled garden, but still a stony cloister encircled them, worthy of their souls and of their fates, so grand and singular was the aspect of the surrounding scenery.

The rocks, arranged circle-like and gradually sloping, gave the idea of a colosseum constructed for Cyclopean work, corroded by centuries and inclemencies without number, but still stamped with stupendous vestiges. Fragments of an unknown writing appeared there, incomprehensible enigmas of Life and of Death; the tortuous veins of the stones flowed with the essence of a divine thought, and in the inclinations of the huge masses, there was a visible stamp, a pre-eminence as in the attitudes of perfect statues.

Here we stopped, and here I brought together the last harmony.

A man of the soil who resembled him who with his hooked iron had cut down the flowering almond branches, led us to a spring hidden in the cavity of a rock; the vein gushed out, murmuring, clear and ice-like, and on the water floated a rustic cup of bark, cracked and bottomless like the useless shell of a fruit.

I offered Anatolia another cup that the man had brought with him, but Violante, without waiting, uncovered her mouth and, bending over the rushing spring, drank with long draughts like a wild beast.

As she rose, I saw the drops coursing from her mouth and chin, but, quickly turning, she lowered the hem of her veil, and, thus concealed, sat down upon the stone close to the wild burst of the brook that for her had such a gentle song, while her posture evoked in my spirit all the spells of her fountains.

Even in her fatigue she did not let herself go, and rest easily, as most women would have done—for she looked almost rigid, erect with a mute hostile pride. And once again everything about her recognized the sovereignty of her presence, secret analogies united mysterious bystanders to her mystery; once again she seemed to drive back my spirit

towards the distances of time, towards the ancient images of Beauty and of Sorrow. She was present yet far away, and in silence she appeared to signify, to me like the Princess Dejanira, "enclosed in a vase of bronze, I possess an ancient gift of an old Centaur."

Anatolia was seated near the thoughtful brother, encircling his shoulders with her arm, while little by little his face seemed to tranquilize with the rise of some inward light.

Massimilla, seated, with the fingers of her hands woven together, holding the tired knee within them, was listening perhaps to the thin, inextinguishable voice of the spring.

Over our heads the sky preserved only light traces of its clouds, like the tiny white ashes of wasted funeral piles. The sun fired in turn the summits of the rocks that reared their solemn lineaments against the azure, and a great sadness and a great sweetness fell from on high into the solitary cloister, like a magic drink in a coarse bowl.

In this spot the three sisters rested, and in this spot I enjoyed their last union.

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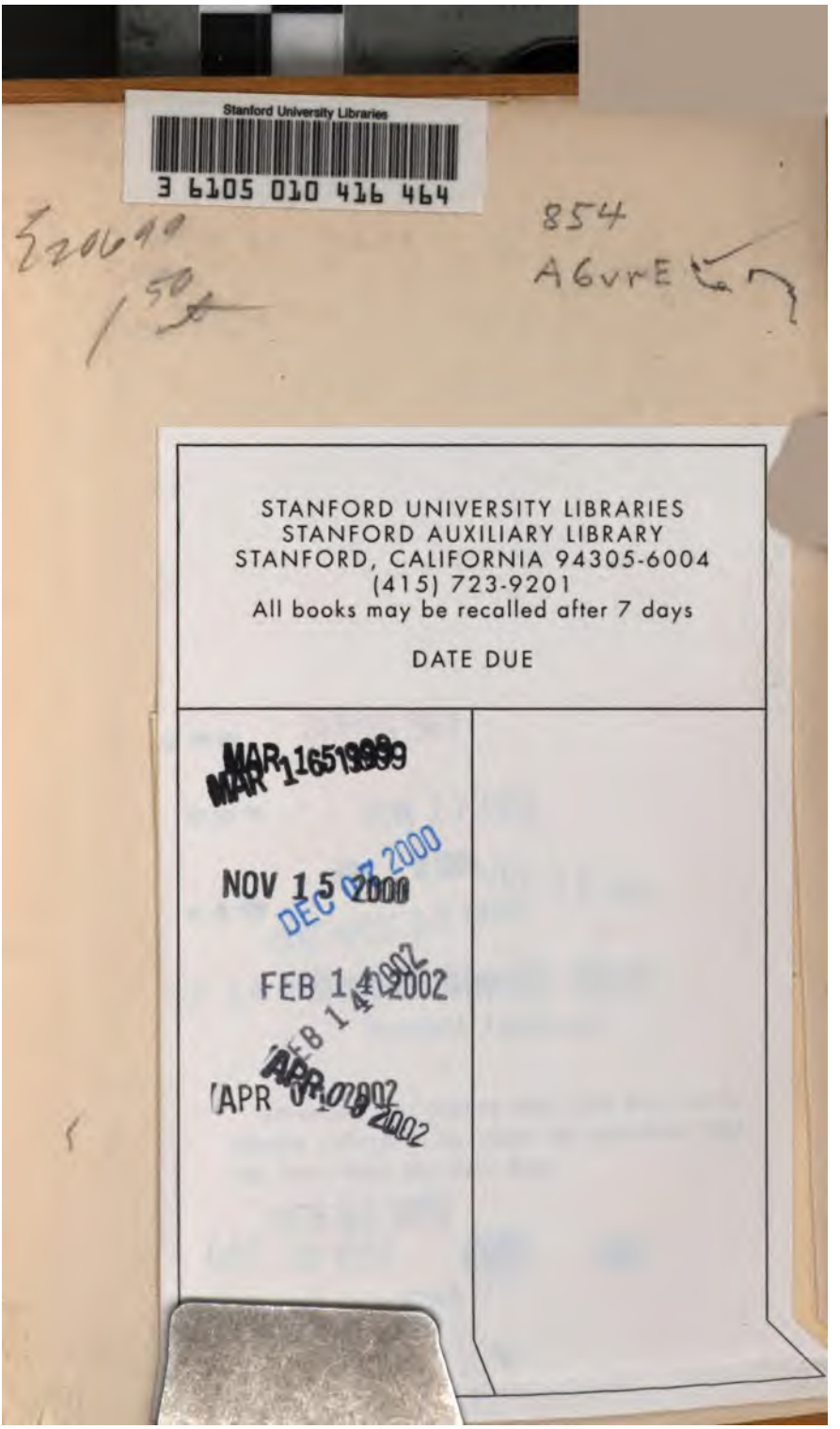
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